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**CAUSERIES DU LUNDI**

(April, 1851—June, 1851)



**UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME**  
**CAUSERIES DU LUNDI**  
**VOLS I., II , III., IV. , V.**

*Others in Active Preparation.*

# CAUSERIES DU LUNDI

By  
C. A. SAINTE-BEUVE

VOL. VI  
(*April, 1851—June, 1851*)

Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by  
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## MIRABEAU AND SOPHIE

### I

(*Unpublished dialogues*)

Monday, April 7, 1851.

A STUDY of the eighteenth century which omitted Rousseau or Voltaire would not be more incomplete than the same Study without Mirabeau. His is the first great figure that opens the era of revolutions; he is the first to translate into speeches and public actions what had been said in books; the first that stands out in the storm, whilst still dominating it. To attack Mirabeau from the front would be a rude task, and he is not one of those who may be taken from the flank and treated superficially. To-day however, thanks to a kindly succour, it has occurred to me to seize upon the most salient episode of his early manhood, that too celebrated episode, his liaison with Sophie, and to make it an occasion for gathering and recalling a few ideas which cannot fail to rise whenever we approach this extraordinary and stupendous person.

Sixteen or seventeen years ago Mirabeau's adoptive son, M. Lucas-Montigny, published eight volumes of *Memoirs*, which he had every right to entitle *Memoirs of Mirabeau*, since the sources are so first-hand, so continually authentic and domestic. The Correspondence of the father and the uncle of the great tribune, the Notice on his grandfather, and in general all the documents which form the groundwork of these eight volumes, have revealed a unique race, characters of a magnificent and lofty originality, from which our Mirabeau had but to descend in order afterwards to launch out into the world, to precipitate himself as he did and to divide himself up among all, so that we may say that he was but the abandoned child, the prodigal and sublime son of his race. Since the publication

of the Memoirs of Saint-Simon, to which the air and the tone of Mirabeau's ancestors naturally carry our thoughts, nothing has been published in the way of historical Memoirs that is so worthy of note. The episode of his amours with Sophie, which were the great sensation and the great scandal of Mirabeau's youth, is treated in these Memoirs with new details and an extreme precision. But the kind of reserve that was commanded by family respect and piety was sometimes a check upon M. Lucas-Montigny, and it is thanks to himself and his obliging communications that to-day we are able to make use of a few documents of which he at the time made a more restricted use. These documents, be it well understood, are not of a nature to add anything to the old scandal, but may be freely shown, and lend themselves to literary or moral considerations; for that reason it was that the honourable possessor entrusted them to us and that we are now utilising them.

When Mirabeau arrived, on the 25 May 1775, to be detained in the fortress of Joux at the request of his father, having been transferred thither from the Château of If where he had been confined for ten months, he was twenty-six years of age, and had been for ten years already a victim to the paternal severities and persecutions. Born on the 9 March 1749 of a Florentine race that had been settled for five centuries in Provence, the fifth of eleven children and the eldest of the boys, Gabriel-Honoré de Mirabeau had brought with him, at his birth, several of the essential features of the father's side, combined however with others that he had from his mother. He was *enormous* even in infancy: 'According to his father's definition he was both physically and morally a *male monstrosity*.' Disfigured, at the age of three, by a malignant and confluent small-pox, which his mother aggravated by the application of some unguent or other, he acquired that mask which we all know so well, whose all-expressing physiognomy however triumphed over its ugliness. On a careful examination, when the first impression was past, one might distinguish, behind those small-pox pits and the puffiness of the face, something delicate, noble and graceful, the primitive lines of his fathers. His hands were of the handsomest. He had the big eyes of the family, which, fascinating in the portraits of his father, his uncle and grandfather, had the same power in him whenever a woman forgot herself so far as to

look at him : ' They are a sort of *sleepy eyes*, he said in a letter to Sophie, which, on my honour, I cannot call *handsome*, even though you should beat me, but which after all express very well, and sometimes too well, all that is felt by the soul which they reflect.' From his mother however (Mlle de Vassan) he inherited certain characteristics which greatly marred and even lowered, according to his father, the original loftiness of the type, which certainly impaired its nobility, but which at the same time softened its harshness. From his mother he had his broad face, his prodigal and sensual instincts and appetites, but probably also a certain Gallic *fund of wantonness*, that power of making himself sociable and human which the Riquetti did not possess, and which afterwards became one of the sources of his power. Wherever he was in person, this young man of an atrocious ugliness, not only impressed, he fascinated. When we speak of Mirabeau, we cannot sufficiently insist upon this very singular, this very determinative physical organisation of his. His father, even when most severe, could not help acknowledging it : ' There is much that is physical in his errors.' What mettle and exuberance could one not expect in a man who came into the world with two ready-formed molar teeth in his head ; who, on leaving Vincennes after forty-two months of seclusion, and when over thirty years of age, had grown not only physically stouter, but *taller*, and whose immense head of hair was endowed with such vitality, that in his illnesses towards the end of his life, the physician, before feeling his pulse, would on coming into the house ask the valet de chambre how his master's hair was that day, whether it was firm and curled of itself, or whether it was limp and straight ?

This gives us only a summary idea of the *monster*, as Æschines called Demosthenes ; but we must not exaggerate anything and not act like children who see only the mask and are satisfied with the first look. What was underneath, we say again, was of a less terrifying nature, of a rich, ample, copious, generous, often gross and vicious, but also often of a delicate, noble, even elegant nature, anything but monstrous, but most human. I will presently return to this latter point and emphasize it more strongly.

It would take too long to try to explain why his father.



the Marquis de Mirabeau, sent his son from one fortress to another, when he was already married and himself a father of a family, besides being a Captain of Dragoons who had distinguished himself in the Corsican war. The alleged causes (a few debts, an affair of honour), however serious they may have been from the point of view of family morality, were quite out of proportion to the punishment, and were not of a kind to dishonour a man's youth or blight his future. The Marquis, a superior man, but proud, feudal, antiquated and yet with a prophetic glance, sprung from one of those unmixed stocks whose last hour had struck, felt for this son, who was inclined to go with the streams of the century, with what he called the *canaille of philosophers, encyclopedists, quill-drivers, scribblers and bookmen*, a sort of astonishment, of admiration even, an antipathetic and repulsive admiration which at times was very much like terror and disgust. One of the gross insults he threw at him in his youth was 'that he would never be anything but a Cardinal de Retz;' and he said again 'that since the late Cæsar, there had never been such an example of audacity and temerity.' Here was abuse enough, and, besides all the family reasons which it would be difficult to unravel, his persecution of his son was prompted in part by that feeling of exalted public and social precaution which would have made him confine and box up, if he had lived in their time and had the power, those worthless fellows who were called Retz or Cæsar.

Be this as it may, Mirabeau arrived at the fortress of Joux near Pontarlier in the Jura range, to be there strictly guarded, and to amend in solitude. The Commandant of the fortress, M. de Saint-Mauris, a man already advanced in years, self-conceited and capable of mean passions, unmasked himself by degrees, and at first granted his prisoner many facilities that bordered on indulgence. Mirabeau only took advantage of them at first, and that during the times when he was not engaged in study, in order to find a few distractions with a rather vulgar lady, belonging to the middle class, who is only known to us by the name of *Belinde*. This Belinde, who belonged to Pontarlier, sometimes came to Le Franc-Bourg, a village situated at the foot of the fortress of Joux, where her father-in-law resided. This neighbourhood led to her acquaintance with Mirabeau, who attached but little importance to the

intercourse. It was not the same with another liaison which was of quite a different order. One day when Mme de Monnier came to dine with M. de Saint-Mauris at the castle of Joux, Mirabeau saw for the first time that young lady who was without a rival at Pontarlier in respect of beauty and manners as well as of rank. Who was this Mme de Monnier ?

Mlle Marie-Thérèse Richard de Ruffey, so well-known by the name of *Sophie*, daughter of a President at the Chamber of Accounts of Burgundy, born on the 9 January 1754, had been sacrificed at the age of seventeen to the Marquis de Monnier, First President of the Chamber of Accounts at Dôle, already a widower and father of a daughter who had married without his consent ; it was to revenge himself that he married again. Mlle de Ruffey was to have married Buffon, whose virile and green old age was at least crowned by fame. In marrying the Marquis de Monnier she only found a melancholy and reserved old man, who appeared nearer seventy than sixty, and when she met Mirabeau, who was twenty-six, she was twenty-one years of age. At the dinner where he first saw her, Mirabeau, already tempted, after talking with Mme de Monnier, entreated her to ask the Commandant's permission for him to go next day to Pontarlier : ' I did not imagine, he wrote later to Sophie herself, that he could possibly refuse you, and I was the less afraid of it on this occasion because, a few days before, Belinde had obtained that slight favour. . . M. de Saint-Mauris did not yield to your kind entreaties, and you were not astonished by this rudeness ; for my part, I was both surprised and offended.'

A few days after, Mirabeau having met Mme de Monnier by chance on the promenade, she asked him if he would not go to a ball and fête champêtre which was to come off at Monpetot, a place which was a league's distance from Pontarlier. He went ; ' all his partners in the dance were enchanted with him,' and he did not lose the opportunity, in the midst of all these gaieties, of talking more particularly and more seriously with Mme de Monnier. They spoke their mind quite freely about M. de Saint-Mauris : ' You described him to me, Mirabeau subsequently said to her when he reminded her of this day, as I then suspected and afterwards knew him to be. You revealed (*montrâtes*) to me a mind and a power of feeling and ob-

servation that I never expected to find at the foot of Mont-Jura.'—'I confess, replies Mme de Monnier, that you inspired (*inspirâtes*) me with that prepossession which confidence gives. You spoke (*parlâtes*) to me of M. de Saint-Mauris with a candour which provoked my own. I knew the man, and I knew better than you how much power he had to injure you. In a word, we were very reasonable at the end of a day on which we had played *Blind-man's buff*.'

In order to satisfy the reader with regard to the source from which I have drawn these words of Sophie, I may say that it is the manuscript book of the *Dialogues*, in which Mirabeau, confined two years later at Vincennes, took a pleasure in recurring to the beginnings of their intimacy and in feasting on the smallest reminiscences of those first happy times. He asked her to send him notes and memoranda about them, which would be his delight: 'Write them with detail, tenderness and naïveté, he said; for my use make a little recapitulation of the dates, of the principal events of our loves (at once so happy and so unfortunate), since I have known thee.' He arranged and wrote up these materials into a series of Dialogues which we possess up to the sixth, which remained unfinished. These Dialogues, which take place now between him and Sophie, now between Sophie and a friend (Mme de Saint-Belin), are written with purity and firmness, in what I may call the good style of Rousseau, the style of the letters and conversations of the *Nouvelle Héloïse*. This form will become more noticeable in the course of my quotations. The reader may have already remarked the frequent use of those too pronounced tenses of the verb (second person plural of the preterite definite), which Rousseau did not avoid. I will continue.

After the ball at Monpetot, which was the third occasion of Mirabeau's meeting with Mme de Monnier, there was a pause in this beginning of their intimacy. M. de Saint-Mauris, who had had intentions upon the young woman, took umbrage and contrived that his prisoner should go as little as possible to Pontarlier. However the coronation fêtes came, the coronation of Louis XVI. 'M. de Saint-Mauris, says Mirabeau, desired me to be a witness of his glory, and I owed to his vanity the permission to go to Pontarlier.' Mirabeau did more, he was the official chron-

icler of the fête (25 June 1775). There is a brochure of his, printed at the time, in which he relates in detail and describes the touching pomps and solemnities of which the town of Pontarlier was the scene on that occasion, of the banquet given to the local notables by M. de Saint-Mauris, of the ring-tiltings, an old custom left by the Spaniards, and the sixty burghers who had formed themselves into a volunteer corps of dragoons, and the mottoes and the illuminations, in short quite a naïve and sentimental bulletin. It makes us smile when we think that this account is written by the same man whose funeral, fifteen years later, equalled in pomp and majesty those of the greatest kings.

M. de Saint-Mauris, however, had not ceased to keep an eye on the strange historiographer he had given himself, and the manner in which he had seen him entertained by Mme de Monnier during the fête had been not at all reassuring. He did everything to prevent the renewal of the like visits: 'Every day the atrabilious Saint-Mauris and his officious knight (one Monsieur de Lalleu) spoke to me of the danger I was exposing myself to in the *societies* which I frequented. This animosity was quite fanciful and unreasonable. Although it was most important for me to keep on the right side of them, I more than once pointed out to them that I was beginning to be very old to have so many Mentors, and that a man of my age, who has always lived in the great cities, was able to bear the excitements of Pontarlier without losing his head.' In order to moderate their zeal, Mirabeau became more and more attentive to the insignificant Belinde, to the extent of making himself ridiculous, as he says. This affectation did not reassure them. They still supposed that Mme de Monnier was having her joke at their expense. Mirabeau, exposed to these petty annoyances, bowed his head and yielded to the necessity of the case; he did not move outside of Le Franc-Bourg where Belinde was settled, and he did not again appear at Mme de Monnier's at Pontarlier. The latter had gone to her estates. Mirabeau himself made some excursions to Switzerland. However Mme de Monnier, on her return from the country, desired to have a catalogue of the bookseller Fauche at Neuchâtel, and Mirabeau grasped the excuse to bring it himself. They met again, explained matters, and made up for lost time,

This explanation is the subject of the first of the Dialogues of which I have spoken : it is a conversation between the *Marquise de M.* (Monnier) and the *Comte de M.* (Mirabeau). The conversation is carried on regularly, in a clear, firm, very correct style, rather like that of a good book, a style that recalls Jean-Jacques rather than Plato. As to the matter, we have just seen some of it. Mirabeau thinks himself in duty bound to justify himself for having been apparently so unsociable in not appearing for nearly six months at the Marquise's house. The Marquise finds means to attack Mirabeau on the subject of Belinde, and the latter denies, on the ground of being a man of sociability, ever having loved her : ' Believe me, Madame la Marquise, with the exception of a very few moments which are very short when they are not preceded and followed by any interest, I suffered much ennui there ; but I was not there as much as you may have thought. Belinde's brother has some books, and I was conversing with them while you thought that I was beguiled by the sister.' And he continues to say some rather strong things,<sup>1</sup> but which are permissible, and were far from displeasing under the circumstances. In short the Marquise, after this explanation, says she is *convinced*, but not yet *persuaded* ; she is not sorry to have another opportunity of hearing fresh reasons : ' But it is striking six o'clock, and the crowd of wits and elegant ladies of Pontarlier are about to invade you, says Mirabeau. The details of what I still have to tell you might carry me a long way. We will, if you please, Madame, put off this conversation to another day.' After this first conversation, the little plots which were laid to prevent Mirabeau from seeing the best of women at Pontarlier, were completely baffled, and, once well received, he was not the man to trouble himself about anything else.

The second conversation or Dialogue, will, on the pretext of resuming the continuation of Mirabeau's explana-

<sup>1</sup> ' In a word, idleness, the stirrings of an exuberant health, if you will permit me to say so, led me to Belinde's side, who happened to be the first to cross my path, whose proximity was a recommendation to my idleness and who has the merit of not being more than twenty years of age. M. de Saint-Mauris' tyranny, the fear and hatred of quarrels decided me. Belinde made a foolish exhibition of herself : I let her do as she pleased, because I could not prevent it, because I knew besides that she had little to lose in the matter of reputation. All that is very far removed from *love*, a word that I never intend to degrade without regret.' . . .

ations, introduce those of Mme de Monnier, and her story. From the beginning she appears to be uneasy about the opinion that Mirabeau may have got of her from others, and she in her turn paints herself naturally in that monotonous existence to which she is condemned :

" I know all the ridicule of which I have been made the subject in this town, but there are people who cannot arouse one's anger. I have not one friend of my own sex at Pontarlier : I have twenty spies and a hundred critics. I listen to them with sang-froid ; I only see them in order not to be always alone. I remain for whole days at home : I read, I write for M. de Monnier's affairs. I occupy my mind seriously with trifles ; in the evenings I play a game of reversi ; I listen to scandal, and soon forget it ; I go to sleep and begin the same over again. In a word, I kill time. It is not a very happy existence, but it is a peaceful one. Keen pleasures give shocks ; and the more we feel them the less tolerable are the intervals in which we miss them. They say that ennui was one day born of monotony : monotony on the contrary saves me from ennui. . . . But I am talking too much about myself. I remember that you promised me some fresh proofs of your indifference to Belinde, and I have a good mind to call upon you to keep your word."

Mirabeau takes advantage of this insistence of the Marquise on the subject of Belinde to provide her with the most satisfactory proof that he is not in love with her : ' It is, he says, that I am in love with another.' Thereupon questions, raillery, coquettish and imprudent curiosity, a less than half-concealed declaration, impatience and fresh curiosity, then a full declaration, as could be foreseen :

' I must satisfy you, says Mirabeau at last, having been brought to the desired point. You desire me to explain myself more clearly, that is equivalent to a permission. I thought it was easy to guess my secret and to read in my eyes that he who sees and hears you is not in love with another. You did not understand it, Madame la Marquise. Very well ! listen to me. What I know of your mind and your soul, which I have penetrated, has aroused feelings in me which your eyes, beautiful as they are, could never have produced.'

The Marquise then becomes serious, as soon as she is assured that she is not being trifled with. Since he is frank, she will reply in her turn with frankness, and she tells the story of her life, how at seventeen she was sacri-

ficed to family arrangements, what snares were laid for her at first in an evil-speaking and narrow-minded society, what false friends tried to worm themselves into her confidence, what worshippers she had to show the door to at first. Saint-Mauris was the first of them :

'He was the only one, said the Marquise, who gained admission to my house. He undertook to cheer my solitude : he assured me that he was in love with me, and that he was the more convenient lover because, being a friend of M. de Monnier, my reputation and domestic peace would have nothing to fear from his attentions. I am repeating to you his very expressions. His declaration appeared very ridiculous to me, and the grounds on which he rested it very odious. M. de Monnier, besides being as young as M. de Saint-Mauris, whatever the latter may say, is certainly more amiable. The whole person of M. de Saint-Mauris inspired me with nothing but repulsion ; he is never so ugly as when he is tender. The Commandant's airs he put on bored me as much as when he adopted the tone of a witty corporal. In a word, I found it so irresistible to make fun of his love that I did not spare him. I assured him besides that it was unworthy of a gentleman to consider his friend's trust as an easy means of deceiving him, and that that way of thinking would be enough to set me against any one who was capable of confessing to it, though he were in my eyes the handsomest and most amiable of mortals.'

Having thus shown up her first wooer, the Marquise continues her confidence. For a woman this is the least embarrassing manner of replying to a man who has just said to her : *I love you*. The answer is put off and, in the meanwhile, she begins to open her heart. After Saint-Mauris there is a M. de Sandone, who might have been dangerous to her : he acted with her in *Zaira*, taking the part of Orosmane : 'He was a young man of my age, handsome, a good figure, and with a modesty that was more touching than all the graces of a dandy. We feel well disposed to timidity ; it leaves something to be divined and does not inspire mistrust. M. de Sandone thought it his duty to enter into the feeling of the part he had to act, and fell in love with me in order to give better expression to that part. He interested me, because he was unhappy . . .' She did not dislike M. de Sandone. They even began an indirect correspondence ; he risked a letter : 'I refused it at first ; afterwards I received it ; I had the weakness to reply ; that

was repeated several times. I wrote only of very indifferent things, but to write was not an indifferent thing.' Happily this M. de Sandone departed in time, his service called him to a distance from Pontarlier before his timidity had taken advantage of her weakness. 'I easily consoled myself, because he had only very lightly touched my heart. The best proof of this is that I was little piqued by his silence; I recovered my liberty then before I had absolutely surrendered it.'

It is not the same with a third person whom the Marquise cannot dispense with mentioning, for the public were already naming him, and she is besides candid and sincere when once one begins to confess one should say everything, for half confidences appear to her as ridiculous as they are dishonest. M de Montperreux, a young officer, bolder and more pretentious than M de Sandone, turned his attentions to the Marquise, and he succeeded better in gaining a return of affection. What was there in him to please and fascinate? the Marquise would be rather puzzled to say. 'This young man, who has nothing very fascinating in his exterior, is remarkable neither for his wit nor for his stupidity . . . His frivolity is wearisome, his tone is peremptory and arrogant, his manners are insincere. He often restrained himself before me, but he sometimes forgot himself. I told him drily my opinions, which rarely agreed with his. In a word, never did a woman start from such a distance to love a man.' Mme de Monnier however at last found the true reason of her weakness in listening to M de Montperreux. 'It is difficult perhaps for a woman who is as young, as unoccupied, as beset as I was, to be told for any length of time that she is loved without being moved. Every day I appeared to be more so, and M de Montperreux thought his love was returned long before I told him so.' The whole of this story which Mirabeau puts into the mouth of Sophie, and which forms the middle of the second Dialogue, is full of nobility, reason, dignity in the confession of a fault, of a half-fault. Sophie speaks as one of Rousseau's women might speak in similar circumstances, his Claire or his Julie, or the Sophie of the *Émile*, or that Mme de La Tour-Francoisville whom we already know. I know not whether Mme de Monnier spoke so well in



reality, with that order and coherence; the letters we have of her are not quite in that tone.

Summing up her confidence on M. de Montperreux, she said that she had been blind to him, to his conceit, his defects, and that he abused the ascendancy he had felt he had over her. This man, 'who has no other passion than self-conceit,' behaved dishonourably. He took a pleasure in parading everywhere his conquest over Mme de Monnier. At the moment when she is speaking, he is with his regiment, and continues to show a portrait he has of her and some letters:

'Judge of my indignation and my pain. I wrote to M. de Montperreux that he had deceived me for the last time, and I demanded the return of the tokens of my foolish attachment: he did not even deign to reply. In all my letters that he is perhaps showing off, the address alone is capable of making me blush. One may read in them truths which are most humiliating to him and indications of my imbecile good-nature, which always tempered bitter reproaches with an assurance of pardon on condition of a more honourable conduct. But that portrait, which I did not fear to trust to such perfidious hands, may and will ruin me. I know M. de Monnier: dissimulating by nature, his vanity makes him affect security. If the slightest circumstance connected with this intimacy or even a well-grounded suspicion were to reach him, he will burst like a thunder-cloud.'

And already the Marquise has made up her mind, she has already resigned herself to the worst. The Custom of the country permits her to dispose of her property, young as she is; she has therefore made her will in favour of a friend (Mme de Saint-Belin), and, at the first scandal that she expects, she is resolved to bury herself in a convent. Here Mirabeau rises and interrupts her:

'Madame, I cannot breathe . . . you are needlessly alarmed. . . . M. de Monnier shall know nothing: your portrait, your letters shall be returned to you; they shall not remain in those infamous hands that sully them.

THE MARQUISE.

'And who will get them back, Sir?

THE COMTE.

'I, Madame.

THE MARQUISE.

'You! just heaven! and with what right?

## THE COMTE.

'With the right that every gentleman has to prevent crime and defend innocence. I am going to Switzerland, Madame: I have some business to finish there which ties my hands. Before a week is over, I shall be back here, and then I will fly to Metz.'

To Metz, where Montperreux is quartered.—A struggle of generosity takes place. The Marquise cries out against such an idea:

'Monsieur le Comte, your generosity blinds you. To prevent a mischief, you are going to commit a greater one. You are a State prisoner, you will ruin yourself if you go and seek a quarrel at a distance from the place to which you are banished; you will ruin me too; people would believe that you have received the reward for this dangerous service, and that I have been vile enough to demand it.'

Mirabeau refutes the Marquise, he reassures her, he proves to her that there is no fear of any scandal, that *the* Montperreux will give back everything without any fuss.

## THE MARQUISE.

'M. de Montperreux is a fire-eater who spends his life in the fencing-schools and is a good swordsman, though he is a scoundrel.'

## THE COMTE.

'I do not believe it, Madame; I have seldom seen men who are so insolent with women who are not very humble with us. In any case, I am not going to Metz to fight, and I shall not fight: I only measure swords with my equals: a scoundrel is not my equal. If he attacks me, I can defend myself, and his crime will fall on his head; but he will not attack me, and I shall have your letters.'

In vain does she object, she is no longer free. His plan is already formed in his head; he will carry it out. It is the nobleman, the knight-errant, the redresser of wrongs, who reappears and here stands out in all his loftiness. He is respectful, he is familiar, he is fraternal; at times he is the friend and almost the comrade, who wishes to oblige his comrade and friend:

'It is not my love that I wish to urge: regard me as your brother; do not think me capable of rendering only interested services. . . . Do not be a woman at this moment. Imagine that you are my friend; that you cannot absent yourself from

here ; that it is important that I should go to Metz in your place. Shall I hesitate ? Can I hesitate ? No, certainly not. Very well ! what difference does your sex make to this duty ? Because you do not wear an epaulette like me, am I not to oblige you ? . . .

Then again the gallant man, the man in love reappears :

' Permit me to kiss this fair hand : I take an oath to deliver into it the portrait and the letters that it has too lightly entrusted. Do not raise any more opposition ; for you would not wish to make me a perjurer, and you could not if you would.'

He is pressing, irresistible, he will listen to no objection, to no putting off :

' What ! you wish me to put off for four months what I can do to-day, whilst four days might suffice to ruin you ! Speak of it no more, Madame, I entreat you on my knees. I leave the day after to-morrow for Berne ; I shall be back here at the end of the week. You will give me a note which will simply command M. de Montperreux to deliver your portrait and your letters to the bearer. I will tell you afterwards the measures I think of taking : you will approve of them. I shall be at Metz in twenty hours ; I will remain there hardly a day, and, twenty hours after, you will be at peace, and I shall be happy, very happy for having been of use to you. At this moment I desire no other felicity ; I am your friend ; I wish to be it : I will carry out my duties before uttering a sweeter name.'

Here the Dialogue ends : the Marquise wants to reopen the subject : she tries not to give her consent to the adventurous plan which charms her ; with a touching voice she utters a last and feeble prohibition . ' Remember that I permit you nothing, that I want to speak to you, that if you take the smallest step without my permission, I will never set eyes on you again.' But how much way has been made in a day ! Mirabeau did not ask for a reply to his declaration of love at the beginning of the interview : in all her digressions and apparent oblivion, has she not already replied ?

There is one point however on which I should like to leave no uncertainty. However weak Mme de Monnier had been with regard to M. de Montperreux, there had been no entire and irreparable fault on her part. Mirabeau found her very much involved, greatly compromised, but nothing more.

The third Dialogue returns to the bold plan of reparation, and the means : the Marquise feels very well that, if she charges Mirabeau with the office of demanding back the letters, she is giving him pledges, the most delicate pledge that a woman can give, and he also feels, in spite of all his fine protestations of pure friendship, that, if he obtains a note from the Marquise saying : *Deliver my letters and my portrait to the bearer*, he will have obtained all. The Marquise now only defends herself in order to be assured that he is really resolved to serve her against her will ; she objects with the desire of being refuted. She does not disguise from herself the fact that all this leads to love, and she fears the consequences. Mirabeau says to her : ' Did I ask you for any gratitude, Madame ? ' She replies very sensibly :

' Truly no, but the less you ask me the more I shall owe you. That is too evident for me to disguise it. However much you may repeat that you only wish to be my friend, you have already spoken to me as a lover. I shall become all the dearer to you when you have exposed your life for me. A man of your age cannot be the friend of a young woman, and I will not be your mistress. Even though experience of the past and dread of the future had not made me averse to every kind of attachment, I have a thousand objections against you. You are only for a time at Pontarlier, and I cannot love only for a time. An absence which might be eternal would grieve me cruelly, and make me very unhappy. I am not sufficiently vain to doubt that the women of the great cities would very soon drive me from your heart. You are twenty-six years of age, and soon love will not be the essential occupation of your life. Ambition calls you and will captivate you. . . . '

' Eternal objections, which a woman's reason (if she has any at all) easily raises up against her heart, but which the latter always no less easily refutes or stifles ! Mirabeau replies to this fear, and he does so with an undoubted sincerity of which he gave proofs enough in the sequel. He thinks that his stay in the Jura district will not be as short as she supposes ; it is not his father's intention to shorten his banishment ; and for himself, he has given up every idea of an ambitious career :

' Since I have been in a situation to make observations, the times have been so difficult, circumstances have been so unfavourable, the spirit of the Government has been so erratic,

its despotism has been so odious and so senseless at the same time, that I have come to regard private life as the place of honour.'<sup>1</sup>

This he said and thought at the time. Five years of passion, of error, of temptation and frenzy, but also of devotion, of suffering and persecution valiantly endured, are the proof of it. What a singular *place of honour* however he had chosen, understanding thereby the private life which he embraced thus only to consume and destroy entirely!

At length, forced from one argument to another, and driven out of all her intrenchments, the Marquise is able to offer no more opposition and capitulates. He offers her the pen to write the two lines to Montperreux: weary with the struggle she takes it:

'Ah! how urgent you are!'

THE COMTE.

'Urgent, eager, importunate . . . whatever you please. . . . Will Madame the Marquise be so good as to write? . . .'  
(*While she is writing*) Ah! if you knew how beautiful compliance makes you, you would never resist.

THE MARQUISE.

'Perhaps I am laying up a long and cruel repentance.

THE COMTE.

'Madame, I have nothing more to reply, the event must justify me.'

And he carries off the note which makes him the attorney and the knight of the injured lady.

What took place then? Mirabeau went to Switzerland. Did he also go to Metz? Did he go in search of Montperreux, or did he employ some other means? In a letter from Sophie, of December 1775, that is to say of the following month, written to a friend, a magistrate at Pontarlier, we merely read these words: 'M. de Montperreux has given up the portrait and three letters, but I know that he has more.'

The portrait was the essential thing, and Mirabeau had a claim to gratitude. The fourth Dialogue shows us that he was not the man to stop half-way. Here our analysis stops. This Dialogue is entirely taken up with combat-

<sup>1</sup> The idea is Addison's.

ting Sophie's scruples, with refuting philosophically her ideas on duty, on modesty. Like most women who, still innocent and pure, have given their heart, Sophie would like to stop at that ; she would like to reconcile the securities and the charms of two incompatible situations. She would like to say with a certain poet :

Si l'austère Pudeur voile un moment sa joue,  
Que sa ceinture d'or jamais ne se dénoue !

Illusion and false hope ! I have before me a sort of letter from her to Mirabeau, written at that time, and in her best writing, a child's writing, badly spelled, but with a visible stamp of ingenuousness. Here it is :

' Ah ! my friend, why cannot I instil into your soul the feeling of happiness and peace which reigns at the bottom of mine ! why cannot I teach you to enjoy in tranquillity the most delightful condition of life ! The charms of the union of hearts are for us joined to those of innocence. No fear, no shame will disturb our felicity : in the midst of the true pleasures of friendship we are able to speak of virtue without a blush.'

It has been pointed out to me that this is nothing else than a passage copied word for word from the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, from a letter of Julie to Saint-Preux (first part, letter IX), with the exception of the word *love* which Sophie has changed to *friendship*. We can only conclude that she borrowed from Julie the expression of her own feelings, and that she offered this desire to Mirabeau as a model.

It was precisely to refute this Platonic disposition, which to him, it must be admitted, was the least supportable, that the ardent and impetuous young man undertakes to argue with Sophie. He does so in that direct, didactic, indelicate fashion, which is properly the stamp and label of eighteenth century passion. The amusing part of the situation is that this conversation, as it is recorded in the fourth Dialogue, really took place almost in the same words, but that they held it at an evening party in the presence of thirty people, talking, it is true, in a subdued voice, in a corner of the drawing-room. Mirabeau was very fond of this fourth Dialogue, and thought it *very pretty* ; it is at least quite in the taste of the century, this time in the taste of Diderot rather than of Rousseau ; and, such as it is, it had a triumphant effect with Sophie. It was on this occa-

sion that Mirabeau wrote again these words, which cannot be denied : ' O my friend, our loves, from beginning to end, are unique ! '

From this day forward, this 13 December 1775, the date of which was preserved by both of them, Mirabeau entered for the love of her into a course of romantic adventures and enterprises of which one was more daring than the other. We will follow them very rapidly. The intelligence which had been established between the Marquise and himself did not escape the Commandant Saint-Mauris, who hastened to seize again and confine the man to whom he had allowed too much liberty. He needed an excuse ; he found it in a bill payable to order which Mirabeau had signed on the occasion of one of his excursions into Switzerland. The bill was only for a small sum, and the date of payment had not yet come round. Thus it could not be said that Mirabeau had contracted fresh debts. The journey to Switzerland had besides been authorised by the Commandant. What did that matter ! he ordered the prisoner to return to his fortress. Here Mirabeau had recourse to stratagem. At a Twelfth Night dinner at M. de Monnier's (January 1776), he won the bean, and he naturally chose Mme de Monnier to be his queen. The latter was going to give a ball in his honour ; it was the Marquis de Monnier who had wished it, for he too had been completely fascinated by Mirabeau, as were all who approached him. Mirabeau asked Saint-Mauris to avoid a scandal, and to put off the execution of his severities till the day after the ball. Saint-Mauris consented, and during the evening of the ball, at which he assisted, he never ceased looking at Mirabeau and the Marquise with a malicious joy. But shortly before the end Mirabeau vanishes, and the next day he is not to be found. Has he crossed over into Switzerland as was rumoured, and as he could easily do being so near the frontier ? No ; he is and he remains concealed during several days in a dark closet of the Marquise's own apartments. It was just the temerity of the deed that was calculated to remove all suspicion.

A single trusty housemaid is in their confidence. Vague rumours however begin to spread among the inmates of the house, and it becomes urgently necessary to find him another place of refuge. It is found at the house of one Demoiselle Barbaud, who is quite devoted to the Mar-

quise ; prudence does not hold him there long. One winter's evening Mirabeau makes his way to the house of the Marquise, arriving at the moment when the household is at supper. It was arranged that the trusty *femme de chambre* alone should be on the watch for him and let him in ; she fails to be there at the right moment ; in the courtyard he meets and abruptly accosts another servant, who raises an alarm and runs back to the office screaming that there is a thief in the house. All the lackeys arm themselves with stakes and pitchforks. The Marquise hastens up at the noise and tries to stop them ; she cannot moderate their zeal, and, in her anguish, follows them. The party move in the direction of the garden where Mirabeau sought refuge. As soon as they caught sight of him, the coachman, the leader of the band, says to the Marquise : ' You see, Madame, that there was somebody.' But Mirabeau comes towards them with a look that makes them repent of their obstinacy ; and then begins one of those high-comedy and dramatic scenes in which he was a past master : ' What are you seeking here ? ' he says to them. — ' Sir, we had no idea it was you, replies the coachman.' — ' And whether it was I or any other, why have you the insolence to disobey your mistress ? Retire. And you, Sage (that was a lackey of the Marquise), take me to M. de Monnier.' They all obeyed. On the way, Mirabeau warns the Marquise in two words to contain herself and to regulate her acts according to what she hears him say. But we will let Sophie speak for herself in the fifth Dialogue, where she is supposed to be talking with a friend :

' In the midst of so unexpected and alarming a crisis, the Count recovers his self-possession in the few moments it required to mount the stairs, enters M. de Monnier's room with the easiest air, embraces him and begins a detailed and probable story. He had just arrived from Berne, and was going straight to Paris to call upon the Minister ; he had arranged his journey in such a way as to enter Pontarlier in the evening, as he did not want to pass through the town without seeing us and thanking us for our kindness. He had chosen the moment when the servants were at supper to enter the house, in order not to have any domestic in his confidence. By an unlucky chance he met *Marie* in the court-yard. She did not recognise him ; the alarm was given, and he was pursued and discovered by all our servants. He entreated the Marquis to ring for them to command their silence. This precaution was absolutely



necessary, he said, to secure his return and close the mouths of those who might spread this news in time for him to be arrested. Observe the art with which he seized the only means of saving my reputation and explaining his nocturnal entry into my house before so many witnesses. The Marquis eagerly rang the bell. The domestics, who never imagined the Count would be so daring as to appear before the Marquis, were stupefied to see us all three together. M. de Monnier gave his orders in a very firm tone, and they withdrew. The Count resumed his discourse with the same tranquillity. He drew from his pocket a letter from his father, which he composed on the spot in conformity with his ideas, commented upon it, and conversed as openly as if he had been paying an ordinary visit. M. de Monnier offered him money, which he declined; and, making the rumour his coming had caused an excuse, he withdrew half an hour afterwards, informing us that he would start at day-break. I saw him to the drawing-room door, and he told me that he would return to his friend's house. The Marquis had not the shadow of a suspicion: he commiserated him, he discussed all the details of his story, and I was left in wonder and admiration, etc., etc.'

How useful it is to be able to act a part in time and to put on a bold front, when one is destined to become the first of orators!

This same man, who thus deceived the Marquis and led him by the nose, might have applied to the Marquis himself to give him a refuge in his house, and he would, without any doubt, have granted it, at the beginning; but Mirabeau had spurned such an idea. Any kind of clever manoeuvre, any audacity he allowed himself: 'Those are fair stratagems in good warfare, he said; but to betray hospitality, to ask a favour in order to deceive one's benefactor, that would be horrible perfidy, and the remorse of it would have poisoned even his pleasures.' I gave this sophism of passion for what it is worth. We will only note this remnant of generosity even in a wrong sense of honour.

M. de Monnier's suspicions having been aroused at last, all the more bitter from their coming so late and being so much at fault, and her position becoming insupportable at Pontarlier, Mme de Monnier asked leave to go back to her own family and returned to Dijon. She was no sooner arrived there when Mirabeau followed her. But he had not been there many days when Sophie's father, Mme de Ruffey, discovered him, and she needed no great cunning

to do so. 'Mme de Ruffey was at a ball at M. de Montherot's (the Grand Provost) with her two daughters and Mme de Saint-Belin, their friend. The Marquis de *Lancefoudras* was announced, and under this formidable name Mirabeau boldly made his appearance, which so disturbed Sophie that her mother immediately divined the cause. She left the room abruptly after the first quadrille, which Mirabeau danced with Mme de Saint-Belin, taking the three young ladies with her, and this exit had the effect of making manifest to all the witnesses just what Mme de Ruffey desired to conceal.' Here excess of audacity overshot the mark, and the scene, which required a perfect sang-froid in both the actors, was a failure.

Mme de Monnier's family sent her back to Pontarlier, and Mirabeau became a prisoner in the Château of Dijon. There he interested the Commandant, the Grand Provost, all who saw him. He had written to M. de Malesherbes, who was still Minister, but soon ceased to be so; Malesherbes replied that he had one last piece of advice to give him, that was to leave the country, and make himself a career in foreign parts. All lent their services to enable him to escape. Mirabeau left France then in June 1776. But his passion did not permit of his going far.

Mme de Monnier, distracted by the severities of her family and especially by the passionate feelings which had arisen in her, burned to join him. They had not ceased to correspond. She at length joined him in Switzerland, at Les Verrières, on the 24 August 1776, and they went from there to Holland. For nine months Mirabeau lived in concealment with Sophie at Amsterdam, leading a laborious existence, the life of a man of letters in the pay of the publishers, what he called a *needy and happy* life, the happiest, he said, that he had ever known. There they were both arrested, on the 14 May 1777, by order of their families who had put the authorities in motion. On her arrival at Paris, Mme de Monnier was placed in a sort of pension in the Rue de Charonne, and then sent to a convent at Gien. Mirabeau was confined in the Donjon at Vincennes, where he remained a prisoner for forty-two months, until the 13 December 1780. This Donjon of Vincennes was the hard study-room where he finished his education. We have a mass and a superabundance of testimonies, both printed and in writing, of his labours

during this interval, of his thoughts, his feelings, his torments, and also of his aberrations, alas ! and his frenzy. The publication of the *Letters written from the Donjon of Vincennes* have told us too much about them. I have here on my table (what is better) his large manuscript sheets, all covered with pleasing or severe notes, extracts from Latin, Greek, English, Italian authors, provisions of every kind and *toothings* which he accumulated for better times and the future. They suggest several reflexions on his method, on the formation of his talent. The subject of Mirabeau is not one of those that can be lightly passed over. My desire to-day has been only to start it.

In the midst of all this, I perceive that I have forgotten to say what Sophie was like, and to give her portrait. We can only give it from Mirabeau's descriptions. She was tall and had a fine figure ; she had a handsome brow. ' If I had not found her a *Venus*, I might have thought her a *Juno*. *O dea certe !* as Virgil says. There was something of a goddess about her.' She had however *Roxelane's* nose, consequently a little retroussé, but without being malicious ; her eyes were soft and *languid* and modest. She had black hair. Her whole personality breathed an air of tenderness, gentleness and ingenuousness. In mind she was artless though shrewd, serious and gay at the same time, with the exuberance of a child, and when once touched by passion, this gentle soul became strong, resolute, courageous. There we have the best side of her. When we follow Sophie however in her manuscript letters, she seems to be morally what Mirabeau had made her ; he had elevated, exalted her : when he is absent, she sinks and falls off, she drops into the nanities and meanesses of her surroundings. Add to this that she carries away and retains a moral stain, a sensual grossness which she has contracted from him, which is the sore of the whole century, and which at times disfigures and degrades this love, even when regarded solely from the romantic side. I will return to this point, and serious lessons will not be wanting.

## MIRABEAU AND SOPHIE

### II

*(Letters written from the Donjon of Vincennes.)*

*Monday, April 14, 1851.*

I SHOULD like to keep from exaggeration and at the same time not to extenuate in any way, to allow morality to hold its own but to bring it in only very simply and sincerely, to be as brief and summary as possible and yet to reach the essential points: in a word I should like to say what is true, fitting and just, in a very fertile and very mixed subject, through which it would be assuredly much more convenient to run headlong and with one's mind made up.

The situation in which we left Mirabeau is as follows. A prisoner at Pontarlier, he had gained the love of a young woman, and was seized with a real passion for her. It cannot be said that he seduced her; young, without occupation, both of them severed, and endowed with the fascination, they had seduced one another. Then a fugitive and already outside of France, with his audacity and his talents, with his sword and his pen, he had endless resources. This young woman wished to join him, and he rapturously acquiesced. This meant again closing his career at the moment when it was reopening before him. Although it meant the overthrow of all regular duties, there was in this extreme act at least a principle of devotion. If he embraced passion in its fury and its pleasures, he also accepted all its serious consequences. During nine months spent in Holland, Mirabeau worked without relaxation for sustenance and daily bread, and, confined all day within doors, overwhelmed with ill-paid drudgery, bore his life lightly, and not only without a complaint, but with a feeling of exhilaration and delight. When he remembered those nine months

spent in Holland, he regretted only eight days wasted at Rotterdam away from his friend, eight days devoted to I know not what scientific congress, to the savants of the country. In the Donjon at Vincennes, he wrote for himself, in his manuscript book of notes and extracts, divers passages from Plautus, whom he read much at that time, and he applied them to his lost happiness; all that pretty passage of the *Pseudolus*, for example, which forms part of the letter from a mistress to her friend: *Nunc nostri amores, mores*. . . . 'Behold our pleasures, our desires, our conversations, with laughter, play, chats, sweet kisses . . . all is destroyed; no more delights; we are separated, we are torn one from the other, if we find not, thou in me, I in thee, a salutary support.' But I prefer this other passage, likewise borrowed from Plautus, where feeling dominates: 'When I was in Holland, writes Mirabeau, I could say: *Sibi sua habeant regna reges*, etc.,' and all that follows. 'Kings, keep your kingdoms, and you, men of wealth, your treasures; keep your honours, your power, your battles, your exploits. Provided that you do not envy me, I do not begrudge you all your possessions.' Such a sentiment, when it is proved by actions, is calculated to redeem many faults. Perilous and blameworthy as it might be to set it up as a romantic ideal and a model, it would be impossible, when we meet with it in life, even in the midst of all we deplore, not to be touched by it.

From the moment that Mirabeau is arrested and confined in the Donjon of Vincennes, we can follow him day by day in his long and rigorous captivity. The Collection of Letters he wrote then appeared in 1792, less than a year after his death. Manuel, Procureur of the Commune, one of the municipal magistrates of Paris, previously a police administrator, had found these letters in cartons in which they had been placed by Boucher, first Clerk of the Secret. Indeed, M. Le Noir, Lieutenant-general of Police, a kind and humane man, touched from the beginning by Mirabeau's situation, allowed him to correspond with Sophie and several other persons, on condition that the letters should pass through M. Boucher's hands, who would only forward those which he judged proper. Boucher, who was not less humane and as discreet as he was delicate, a really noble soul and a heart of gold

buried in the dens of the Police of that time, lent his countenance to this correspondence with all the indulgence and, we may say, with all the tenderness compatible with his duties. Mirabeau's letters went through his hands to their destination; he only stipulated that the originals should be returned to him. It is these originals that Manuel, a public officer, found in the cartons and appropriated without any scruple, boasting, for greater effect, that he had discovered them *under the ruins of the Bastille*, of which he was one of the *vanquishers*. He published the whole, pell-mell and in a mass, with an exalted and incoherent Preface which caused a scandal even at that time, in 1792. There is a fine article by André Chénier, published in the *Journal de Paris* (12 February), in vindication of the morality, language and good taste which had been equally outraged in this ridiculous and revolting Preface of the magistrate-editor. One cannot sufficiently deplore this publication of Manuel; for from this same mass of papers, falling into worthy hands, instead of four volumes which were calculated to leave a stain on his reputation, there might have been extracted, without any infidelity and by means of simple suppressions, two or three volumes of a pathetic, grave, eloquent nature, 'a work at once attractive and almost irreproachable, full of piquant subjects for psychological studies and examples of style, whose grace would have been sullied by no impurities, whose charm would have been accompanied by no danger.' This is the judgment of M. Lucas-Montigny, and, after a reading so full of contrary impressions, some of which are painful and disagreeable, I am pleased to rely on that judgment and to repeat it.

What is least good in these *Lettres écrites du Donjon de Vincennes*, is precisely the love letters. For the most part they exhibit the false taste, the false exalted tone and the false colours of the time; they contain a mixture of Marmontel and Fragonard, and, though they express true feeling, they are to-day calculated to provoke a smile rather than emotion. But when Mirabeau writes to his father, to M. Le Noir, to the Minister, or when he entertains Sophie with those subjects which take him outside of his plaintive cooings, then he stands out and becomes great; the writer appears and feels at his ease; the orator already.

half rises up. It is here that he becomes interesting.

As a writer Mirabeau is in general judged rather severely. That impertinent Manuel lauded him for having *shaken off all despotisms, even that of language*. Rivarol called him a *terrible Barbarian in the matter of style*. Let us guard ourselves against exaggerations and those ready-made expressions which exempt one from any investigation. Mirabeau was sprung from a family which had an original, energetic, picturesque style, a style after Saint-Simon or, to call things as they deserve, a style *à la Mirabeau*. His father and his uncle the Bailli wrote in that way. He himself began by writing in that lofty and feudal style a Notice on his grandfather, which he composed at the time of his detention in the Château of If (1774); he was twenty-five years of age. But already, about this same time, he had composed an *Essay on Despotism* in the more general language of the day and with the conventional portion of declamation and common-places which circulated at the time.

The truth is that Mirabeau (as I remarked at the beginning) was not only by his organisation a man of that lofty and feudal, unsociable and inaccessible race to which his fathers belonged, those men who boasted of being all of a piece and *without juncture*. His father, who knew him well, who persecuted, cursed, hated, and finally saluted and admired him, his father said of him: 'He is not built with the same clay as I, haggard bird whose nest was between four turrets.' He, by no means haggard, by no means shy and unsociable, having retained his ancestors' gift of command, and joining to it *that terrible gift of familiarity*, which enabled him to manage great and small and shape them to his will, he aspired by instinct to the common life and to a universal popular action. The orator that was born in him, and that stirred early below the writer, felt very well that, to arrive at that vast and sovereign action, to embrace the masses and the crowds with a familiar and powerful turn, it was necessary to quit what I may call his patrimonial and domestic language, that quite particular manner of expressing himself which was the stamp and sometimes the cipher of his house; it was necessary to quit once for all the family style and come down from his mountain. He came down then, and, to reach that general and public language, he did not fear,

to swim across the sea of declamation and plunge into the full current of the century, sure as he was of issuing from it in the end not less original and greater. When we observe Mirabeau in this intermediate state of development, in most of his writings and pamphlets, we find him unequal, unfinished, crude, and we can easily exult over him. To be just, let us not forget his starting-point and his goal : the starting-point, that is to say the rugged, uneven, craggy style of his ancestors, from which he had to come down at any price to conquer the masses and display his broad sympathies ; the goal, that is to say the definitive orator who was the outcome of it and who powerfully dominated his epoch in the greatest social storm that ever was.

As a writer no doubt Mirabeau was not conscious of all these things. He wrote from hand to mouth, through need, from necessity, employing all the means within his reach : ' It seems to be my fatal destiny always to be obliged to do everything in twenty-four hours.' However, in spite of the inequalities and the obstacles, his powerful inner nature followed its bent and pushed its way. The God was in him, who watched, who unconsciously restored order and a sort of superior harmony even in the tumultuous disorder and stormy chaos of the man.

Keep this in mind when approaching the *Letters written from Vincennes*, and you will appreciate them from the right point of view, the only point of view from which they merit the attention of the observer and the sage. We will leave the foolish and dishevelled elegies of the beginning ; I pass them over, I continue, and on almost every page I seem to feel the suppressed and groaning orator : ' O my friend, how thy Gabriel is degraded ! Had nature created him to waste useless days in a chasm like this ? Was not his manly and active mind destined for something better ? Did not his kind and tender heart deserve a better lot ? . . . One can have no idea of the kind of life we lead in this place, whence can issue nothing but madmen, if the unfortunate inmates are left for any length of time, and where they die raving. What torments could be as cruel as these *mute and terrible severities* ! ' Confined within those thick walls, he has the movements, the exclamations and the involuntary gestures of the orator. In a letter to Sophie, in which he expounds the principles of civil toler-



ance (for this Correspondence is only a waste-weight for all the thoughts and all the studies which occupy him at different times), he will suddenly exclaim: '*Look at Holland*, that school and theatre of tolerance!' Evidently this *Look* (*Voyez*) is not addressed to Sophie, with whom he habitually uses the more intimate *tu*: it is the writer, the orator, and no longer the lover, who is here addressing the absent and ideal audience that his imagination never loses sight of. Even in matters of love, in his elegiac reminiscences, writing to his lady, he defends her in imagination before her accusers, and in his defence he rises up, he frequently faces the absent public, whom he apostrophises and invokes: 'Do you mean to say (*Voulez-vous*), he asks, that she has done an act of imprudence? She alone has expiated it. Nobody in the world but she and her lover has been punished for their error, if thus you call (*appelez*) their conduct. But what will you call (*nommerez-vous*) the courage with which she has supported the most frightful of reverses? her perseverance in her opinions and sentiments? the nobility of her behaviour in the midst of the most cruel distress, the seemliness of her conduct in circumstances so critical? . . . If those are not virtues, I know not what you call (*vous appellerez*) virtues; and if you agree (*vous convenez*) with me that they are virtues, etc. . . .' We see that he is pleading. In spite of the orator's being caged, he rises up, he gesticulates, and the dungeon, dead to sound though it is, re-echoes his words.

In the admirable Memorandum or justificatory Letter which he wrote to his father, the tone is quite oratorical and at times reaches a high eloquence. After a long and able exposé of his conduct and of the circumstances which might be regarded as an extenuation of his wrongs; 'There, my father, he says in conclusion, there is an outline of what I might say: no doubt it is not the language of a courtier; but you did not put into my veins the blood of a slave. I dare to say: *I was born free*, in places where everything cries to me: *No, thou art not!* And this courage is worthy of you. I address to you respectful, but great and mighty truths, and it is worthy of you to hear them and agree with them.' All this is made to be said standing, with head erect, with animated gestures and speaking physiognomy. In Mirabeau the writer I per-

ceive at every moment the orator who is half bending forward, in advance of and above his phrase.

After trying to make the noble and proud chord in his father to vibrate, he comes to the pathetic, and he has some fine accents. I pass over a few common phrases on his *sixth lustre*, on the *book of life* from which he is *cut out*, as above I passed over the *devouring beak of the vulture* to which he is *delivered*, the *thunderbolt* which has *opened the cloud*, etc. : these are images which appear to be worn threadbare in the writer, but which, broad, full and sonorous, always attain their effect in the mouth of the speaker. Side by side with these we have some better and more original ones : 'The sufferings of my soul have extended to my body. *My first years, very prodigal years, had already to some degree disinherited the following ones, and scattered a part of my forces.*' The poetic breath, which is rare in Mirabeau, seems to have passed over that passage, and over this too : 'If you give me back the freedom, even the restricted freedom, which I ask of you, the prison will have made me wise ; for *Time, who has hastened over my head with a much lighter tread than over others*', has *awakened me from my dreams.*' Elsewhere, speaking not to, but of his father, he uses a kind of image which recalls the preceding ones : 'He began by trying to enslave me, and, unable to succeed, he preferred to break me rather than *let me grow at his side, for fear lest I should raise my head whilst the years bow his.*' Mirabeau has been denied imagination properly speaking ; he certainly has the oratorical imagination, that which consists in calling up great historical names, celebrated figures and groups, and bringing them on to the scene in the perspective of the moment : but, in the passages I have just quoted, he shows that he was not devoid of that other and lighter imagination, which is akin to poetry.

I have spoken of the pathetic notes with which he tries to move his father at the end of his Memorandum ; but the reader would form too vague an idea of it if I did not quote the text of that page, at once so eloquent and so real, so correct in its painting and so heart-rending :

'This unnatural state to which I am subjected, writes this captive son to the man who entitled himself the *Friend of man*, is undermining the remnants of my existence. Internal ills are waging a cruel warfare against me. Now I am exhausted

by an abundant hemorrhage, indicating what a revolution has been worked upon me by the life of confinement. Now I am torn by a renal colic, to which you know I have always been subject : want of exercise increases and aggravates the attacks. My eyes, inflamed by the continual absence of sleep, succumb under the application of an endless labour, for which I have hardly any resources, from which nothing can divert me ; the sight is so weakened that it refuses me service. My chest, oppressed by blood, breeds a slow poison that eats me away. In a word, *my moral and physical being sinks under the weight of my fetters*. But, truly, I will not expose myself to the slow and creeping approach of stupidity, despair, and perhaps dementia. ' I cannot bear this kind of life ; my father, I cannot bear it. *Suffer me to see the sun, to breathe more at large, to see the faces of human beings*, to have some literary resources, so long the only relief to my ills ; suffer me to know whether my son breathes and what he is doing. . . . '

That is the admirable and painful page which it is impossible to read without emotion and tears. It is the glory, we say it openly, it is the moral redemption of Mirabeau to have thus suffered, to have been a man in everything, not only by his faults, his impulses, and, we say reluctantly, by his vices, but also by his heart and his bowels ; to have been poor and to have had the courage to bear poverty ; to have been a father and to have wept ; to have been as hardworking as the meanest of upstarts ; to have been imprisoned and persecuted, and not to have given way to despair, not to have become embittered ; to have shown his ample and generous nature by issuing from these crushing captivities, in all his strength and all his goodness and even his gaiety, neither enervated, nor exulcerated, without a shadow of hatred, but resolved to win for all, in the light of the heavens, the lawful rights and the inviolable pledges of free and modern society. I designedly draw him in his great lines, his luminous curves, which at this distance, whence posterity henceforth judges him, cannot be concealed nor obscured by stains and splashings of details.

This Correspondence of Vincennes gives a presentiment of the whole future man. He is there in the block or rather in fusion, in an immense ebullition. We begin to repeat with him : ' After all, it is only the men of strong passions who are capable of attaining to great things ; they alone are capable of meriting public recognition. . . . '

Should we not think that through his prison bars he already has a glimpse of the Pantheon ?

This feeling of his worth and of what he might be, he has to a profound degree ; but how well he expresses it, without any boasting and still with a kind of modesty ! It would be easy for me to figure Mirabeau in fetters at Vincennes as a Titan, a giant, an Enceladus under Etna, or what you please ; I prefer to leave him what he was, a man :

‘ Perhaps, he wrote to M. Le Noir, that fair-minded and generous Lieutenant of Police, perhaps, if you will allow me to say so, I might be turned to some more useful and human account. I do not think myself *either above or beneath anything*. I am not beneath anything, because I feel my strength and my zeal, because after all I am a man-like any other. I am not above anything, because patriotism, utility, and above all *a man*, may honour everything. Not all the red heels will speak thus ; but for that very reason I am perhaps as good as they in every respect. Once more, I am interred : however, if I believe my head and my heart, and *that inexplicable presentiment which is often the voice of the soul*, my life might perhaps not be a useless one. Think of me, Sir, at that time which, if I am to believe the omens of the last months in which I lived among the living, is to be pregnant in events (*the American War*) ; think of me, I say, or rather (for I have sufficient proofs that you deign to concern yourself with my poor existence) recall it to others.’

And this same man, about this same time, after months of captivity, feeling the return of the fine season which to him too brought new birth and suffering at the same time, while at last enjoying a little alleviation of his confinement, consisting in an airing every day between eight and nine o'clock, wrote to Sophie : ‘ It is very short, but I leave the garden without regret, in the thought that I am making room for some unfortunate companion of my lot.’ Do you not feel these to be the words of the simple humane man who is able to sympathise with others, the man of Virgil and the man of Terence ?

Mirabeau had many vices and grossnesses, the result of his temperament ; he had others which were the result of circumstances and of the life of deprivations which continual necessity imposed upon him. He had also a good share of the power of acting and playing a part, proceeding from his talent, which so easily and, we venture

to say, almost inevitably enters into the constitution of every public man to whom it is given to lead others : but his heart was warm at bottom, his convictions at bottom were sincere, just as later we shall see that his political views, apparently so violent and so stormy, were at bottom entirely sensible.

I return to the writer, and to the orator who is the prelude to the writer. Mirabeau unconsciously and naturally loves and affects a broad and full and rather coarse expression. He will say *a vast heart*. He will say of his lady's glances that they *pump* love up to his lips. He will say of the child he had by Sophie (for Sophie was confined of a daughter during the first months of his imprisonment), whilst regretting that they are unable to bring her up between them : 'Our kisses would have incessantly *breathed* health into her.' We have heard him speak of *his whole being which sinks* under the state of oppression and misery to which he has been reduced. We feel throughout from under his pen the gush of a strong and ebullient nature, and the outbursts of a voice as it were which only asks to growl and thunder. He uses those words which fill the mouth when uttered aloud, and which awaken echoes. He attains without an effort to the fulness and solemnity of his images. Of his father, for example, he will say : 'With a very vast mind, he had only very mean ideas for his house. Though he had influence, he did nothing for it ; though he had order, he ruined it, without keeping either his condition or his rank ; he isolated himself in the midst of his people ; *he carpeted with remorse the avenues to his tomb*, and he dug the grave of his name.' The image is grand ; to be completely accepted, it would require to be paraded from the height of the speaker's tribune, to be supported and as it were illustrated by gestures. Seeing it on paper, one has time to ask oneself what he means by that *remorse which carpets an avenue*.

In a short and very dignified Letter to the Comte de Maurepas, a friend of his father and at that time de facto Prime Minister, Mirabeau energetically demands his release and his freedom. He lays great stress on the word *parricide*, and gives M. de Maurepas to understand that by countenancing it as he does he will make himself an accomplice in it. He ends up with this direct outburst

full of effect and poignant power, addressing himself to an old man : ' My father often speaks of a rewarding God, and you no doubt believe in him ; you are advancing into a happy old age, and my father is bordering upon it. Very well ! Monsieur le Comte, may it be a long and fortunate one for both of you ! may the recollection of me never poison it with remorse ! may you both, at your last day, find more mercy than you have shown ! ' That is again a magnificent oratorical movement, but a little disproportionate and so to say stifled in a letter.

To make it more clear that it is the orator that is here wholly on the scene and who seeks his argument in the conscience of his adversary, I have but to recall what Mirabeau says in twenty places : ' I believe in a God, but not in a rewarding God.' For his part he believed in a First Cause which he does not otherwise define, and not in the immortality of the soul. But here the belief and the age of his adversaries provide him with a powerful moving spring, and he grasps at it as surely as if he had the principle of it in himself. The orator has the privilege of believing eloquent things, at least during the short instant when he says them.

In his early youth Mirabeau thought himself destined for a warlike career and for martial glory : ' Brought up, he says, in the prejudice of the service, boiling over with ambition, greedy for fame, robust, audacious, ardent, and yet very phlegmatic, as I have experienced in all the dangers I have been in ; having received from nature a quick and excellent eye, I could not but think that I was born for the service. All my views were therefore turned in that direction.' He had begun to study the trade of war and all its branches, engineering, artillery, even the details of commissariat, as he studied all things, with passion, with the ardour proper to his hardworking and absorbing nature, that capacious, voracious, and never satisfied nature. But the philosophical ideas of the century had gradually cooled this warlike ardour ; seeing his father moreover bent upon closing against him every regularly marked-out career, he had retired within himself, and his mind, *hungry for every kind of knowledge*, had thrown itself upon other studies, which he carried on exhaustively. He had embraced political, foreign, international, even financial subjects in their

whole extent ; and this was indeed the first form in which Mirabeau appeared as a publicist and author of so many writings and pamphlets since his release from Vincennes (end of 1780) until '89. But all this was only the preparation and the Course of studies as it were of the orator, who, according to the ancients, should know everything, in order to be able to speak on any subject. Those who judged him only externally often compared the Mirabeau of this intermediate epoch with a *big sponge* that is swelled with others' ideas and with all that circulates in the surrounding atmosphere ; and his father, a severe judge, even when he had softened towards him, often recurred to this image of a *big sponge*, with which he compares his son's greedy organisation. He said again of him, after a kind of reconciliation in 1781 : ' Whilst my friends were so terrified by his strange reputation and his formidable talent that they thought I should die at his mere approach, I only found him as I had left him : as much intellect as it is possible to have ; an incredible talent for seizing the surface of everything, and nothing, nothing at all beneath ; and, instead of soul, a *mirror* that takes up transitorily all the images that is presented to it and retains not the slightest memory of them. It is impossible to speak reason, wisdom to him, but he will say a hundred times better, and all that is no more than skin-deep. He appropriates nothing, but grasps everything. . . . You may speak to him of any art, science, literature, antiquity, on any branch of knowledge and any language whatever, he knows three times as much, snatches at everything, jumbles up everything, but he affirms with an assurance and a heat which is awe-inspiring. . . . A good fellow on the whole, and, at bottom, only a phantom in good as in evil.' We perceive here the father's error at the same time as the force of his admission. Whenever he talks with his son and hears him speak, be the subject what it may, he is fascinated and almost conquered ; but he resists, he secretly protests, and will not believe that it is any more than a mask, a mouth-piece and an echo. He prefers to believe in a spell rather than in a real talent. That vast, pregnant and powerful intelligence, clothed with so admirable and sudden a faculty for putting words into action, was beyond his comprehension, and he refused to see anything but the

semblance, the acting, the theatricalness, the sonorous machinery, without doing justice to the real soul which united, inspired and put passion into all that. It would be curious, and I will perhaps do it some other day, to follow the variations, the struggles, the violent contradictions of this father who was both angered and humbled by his son, and, at rare moments, proud of him, during those years of so mixed and still so doubtful a celebrity, which was the prelude to his fame. However this word fame, the implacable father, vanquished in his last days, ended by uttering from afar over the radiant head of his son. When the pamphleteer Mirabeau had definitely ceased to be, and Mirabeau the orator had lifted up his head, when he had assumed his great rôle in the assemblies of the Provençal Estates and already stood out clearly as the tribune and the peace-maker at the same time, the old man, reading the account of these memorable scenes, exclaimed: 'That is fame, that is true fame!' And about the same time (22 January 1789), he wrote to his brother the Bailli, speaking of his son: 'It will be a long time since they have seen such a head in Provence. *The callus, which only formed the curiously sounding brass-is broken.* I have verified it myself and, in a few conversations and communications, have really perceived *genius.*' Genius and fame, there we have the last word of this father who was so long pitiless and impervious to attack: it is the last blessing he sends his son. And he dies on the 11 July 1789, three days before the decisive Revolution in which Feudalism is swallowed up for all time. Mirabeau responds in a touching way to this tardy justice of his father, by requesting, he, the prisoner of the Fortress of Ré, of the Château of If, of the Château of Joux, of the Château of Dijon and the Donjon of Vincennes, he who is soon to be borne in pomp to the Pantheon, by requesting, at the hour of his death, to be interred at Argenteuil between his grandmother and *his father*. Do not let us then judge these quarrels of generations, which are really the conflicts of the geniuses of two epochs, from our present-day family and bourgeois point of view. Let us acknowledge that in these extreme souls there was a grandeur which astonishes us, which surpasses us and which has perished:

*Grandiaque effossis mirabitur ossa sepulchris.*



At Vincennes Mirabeau worked ardently, night and day, sleeping only three hours, and half blinded by his nocturnal labours. He wrote unceasingly, he read only with his pen in his hand, and he interested himself in all subjects. The lover was still all alive and frantic in him; the father was quite occupied with the child who was just born and lived so short a time; the prisoner multiplied his protests, his apologies, his Memoranda, with a view to regaining his freedom, and, meanwhile, the student devoted himself to reading everything that he possibly could, to the translation and composition of divers works, some two or three of which we should like to annihilate for ever, for the honour of his love, for the dignity of his misfortune and of his genius. Let us quickly remove these shameful stains by noting them. Among the manuscripts that I have before me, and which M. Lucas-Montigny has been good enough to entrust to me, I find a translation of the *Agricola* of Tacitus; a little *Traité de l'Inoculation*, intended to enlighten and convince Sophie, in order that she might have their child inoculated; a little *Abrégé de Grammaire française*, also intended for that child whom they had named *Gabriel-Sophie*. Here are the terms à la Saint-Preux in which he dedicates this little treatise à la Port-Royal:

'My Sophie, you remember how your mother once wrote to me to entreat me to *teach you spelling*; I know not how I came to neglect so serious a recommendation. We must have had something more urgent to study. Alas! necessity bids us to-day to suspend our studies of that time. Let us return then to orthography (to please thy honoured mother): but I only know one means of writing correctly, that is to possess the language by principles.

'I have endeavoured to give you in twenty-five pages all the essential rules of the French language, to explain all the difficulties, to enumerate the principal exceptions in a manner as correct as it is concise, and I think I have succeeded. A little Memorandum of the Abbé Valart, an able grammarian, suggested the idea and has been of service to me. (*There follow a few technical details.*) . . . My Treatise, which is not four pages longer than his, contains all that. I hope that you will find it very clear and even within the capacity of the most *illiterate*; but remember that I can only make myself understood to attentive minds.

'This Memorandum is more than sufficient to enable you to

teach your daughter French by principles Grammars do not give style, but if *Gabriel-Sophie* has thy soul she will easily find a Gabriel, they will love one another as we do, and I answer for it that she will write well It is for her that I have written this little work, which has cost me time and trouble; it is for her, I say, for, with regard to yourself, I should be very grieved if you were to consult my Grammar about any sentence that is intended for me. Ah! what thy heart can say, art and wit will never find'

I have before me also an Essay on *Tolerance* which occupied him at the same period. In the printed Letters to Sophie we find a good number of phrases and passages extracted from this work, and from the works in general which occupied Mirabeau at this epoch, and we cannot be astonished at it. In this life of solitude and silence to which he was condemned, he felt the need to talk, to unbosom himself whenever he could, to pour out at every opportunity, and through every outlet, the overflow of his thoughts on every matter. Mirabeau, besides, had early and by instinct adopted that habit, I had almost said that method of copying others or of copying himself, of compiling in advance for his own use stores of thoughts and tirades which he made use of without any scruples, according to the occurrence, even over and over again. The ancient Rhapsodists proceeded in the same way. This method, which is by no means that of the writer, appears to me on the other hand natural enough and very useful to the orator, who, having to speak constantly to crowds and on the spur of the moment, must have accumulations of every kind, and who is never called to account for these repetitions when they are well placed and relieved by touches of a quick and sudden appropriateness. I recommend this view to those who should consider Mirabeau closely as a writer, it leads us directly to Mirabeau the orator

The judgments which Mirabeau brought to bear upon the writers of his time would likewise tend to show that he was not precisely one of them, and that his superiority aspired to unfold itself in quite a different sphere. Whenever he speaks of them he is lenient, he is modest, he places himself behind them, he truly admires them to excess. If he takes upon himself to translate Tibullus, he will bow down even before M. de Pezai. From the deferential manner in which he speaks of Marmontel,

of Thomas, of Raynal and of the minor writers, we feel that, as he so readily gives them the wall in literature, that is not the definitive field of battle he has chosen. He holds himself a little aloof from them all; he does not bring to his judgment of them that accurate and jealous care which denotes the rival and the man of the trade. He is an eager, curious amateur, who travels the country, questions everybody in passing, disdains nobody and evidently thinks only of his own instruction. But when he speaks of the *great Rousseau* and the *great Buffon*, I love to listen to him; he is in harmony with himself, and we feel that in admiring them as he does, he is paying tribute to that ample, easy, developed, luminous style, which is made to reach and impress the universality of men. One day Sophie compared him to Rousseau; he recalls her to order and respect: 'Look, Sophie, I should beat you if I could, when you give such a rein to your extravagant enthusiasm as to say those stupid things. Have you the face to compare my style with Rousseau's, one of the greatest writers who ever lived? . . .' And he continues with the sincerest of eulogies. And elsewhere he is angry that she should have weighed him in the same scales with Buffon: 'None of those frivolous phrases, Sophie. In the matter of science, to compare M. de Buffon's opinion and authority with mine, is to compare the eagle with the sparrow. M. de Buffon is the greatest man of his age and of many others. . . .' And he says somewhere in one of his manuscript notes written at Vincennes: 'We may justly apply to M. de Buffon what Quintilian says of Homer: *Hunc nemo in magnis*, etc.'—'Never will he be surpassed in respect of elevation in the great subjects, in respect of correctness and propriety of terms in the small. He is at once fruitful and concise, full of gravity and charm, admirable for his abundance and his brevity.' I love to note even these exaggerations of praise; they prove at least how frankly Mirabeau, having come down from the rugged peaks of the paternal style, was seeking out and proposing to follow the high road, the ready-traced Roman high road, the really triumphal way in eloquence. No, Rivarol, the man who felt thus, who was proceeding in this high direction and still growing, was not a *Barbarian* in the matter of language.

I will bring the romance to a close. The curious may seek its sequel and dénouement in M. Lucas-Montigny's third Volume; there they will see to what combination of circumstances, to what concerted efforts Mirabeau at length owed his release from the Donjon of Vincennes; they will also see the principal vicissitudes of the lawsuit which he maintained with the family of M. de Monnier, and the resources of every kind which he unfolded until his adversaries perceived the utility of a compromise. Here I will only give a few final details about Sophie. That great and immortal love had been gradually worn away in suffering and absence. The letters she wrote to Mirabeau, during the last period of his imprisonment, reflect the petty or vulgar distractions which surrounded her in her convent at Gien. Mirabeau, after his release, hastened to see her for a moment in July 1781. After this short interview, in which it might be said that their passion spent its last fire, it appears that neither of them felt themselves bound to a prolonged and stubborn constancy. To expect fidelity of Mirabeau when free and roaming the world, was to expect it of Theseus, of Hercules, of those flighty and robust heroes of antiquity. Sophie, still confined at Gien, ended (we regret to say) by openly following his example. Towards the end she formed a real bond of the heart and conceived a real passion for one M. de Poterat, an ex-Captain of cavalry, who was like herself about thirty-five years of age, and she was about to marry him when he died of consumption. She was resolved beforehand not to survive him. M. de Poterat expired on the 8 September 1789, and on the next day Sophie was no more. She had asphyxiated herself in the apartments attached to the Convent des Saintes-Clares at Gien, where she had continually resided. Her friend Dr Ysabeau, who had attended to her for some years, entreated his brother-in-law the Curé Vallet, a deputy to the Constituant Assembly, to communicate the sad news to Mirabeau. The strange manner in which he carried out his commission and the effect which the news produced may be read in the following letter:

'My brother-in-law gave me the particulars of that terrible event, and commissioned me to break the news to M. de Mirabeau, imagining that such a body contained a feeling soul. Knowing him as I did, I did not take so many precautions. I

went to inform M. de Villiers, who said to me : ' How will you do it ? '—' Simply, I said, by giving him my brother-in-law's letter to read : I will not even say anything about it.' I went and sat beside him ; he knew me very well, and hated me the more. He asked me what I wanted on that side of the Assembly. Without answering, I handed him the letter I had just received. He was very long reading it ; I fixed him with the greatest attention ; his face turned pale and was distorted from time to time ; he recovered himself, he continued to read, then he sighed, coughed, spat, and ended by affecting firmness of character. He rose up abruptly, handed me back the letter with a salute, and left the Assembly, where he did not appear for two or three days.'

Do you not wonder that this witness, blinded by prejudice and party spirit, at the very moment when he is accusing Mirabeau of want of feeling, should on the contrary testify to his seeing him so disturbed and shaken by the blow which he so cruelly dealt him ? His testimony turns against himself.—Thus ended at thirty-five years the life of that Sophie whom Mirabeau had not abducted whom he had not forsaken either, but who had thrown herself in his way by a mutual passion, and whom the force of circumstances alone had been able to tear from him ; that Sophie whom he had enkindled, whom he had intoxicated with strong emotions, and to whom, on quitting her, he had left the consuming robe of the Centaur, the fatal ardour which cannot be extinguished.

I am not here saying farewell to Mirabeau. I know that a near occasion is in preparation for speaking of the politician and the definitive Mirabeau, and I rely on not missing the occasion.

## HÉGÉSIPPE MOREAU AND PIERRE DUPONT<sup>1</sup>

*Monday, April 21, 1851.*

I RARELY speak of poetry in this place, precisely because I have loved it much and still love it more than anything else: I should be afraid of speaking ill of it, or at least of not being able to speak well of it, of not having enough good to say about it. The productions of recent years have been feeble, especially in the lyrical order, the same in which twenty or thirty years ago we had most novelty and wealth. It would seem as if the budding and the flowering seasons were over, and we had reached the autumn. One School has had its day, and we are awaiting another that deserves to be greeted as a really new one. The present-day poets fall in repetitions, limit themselves to variants, take refuge in caprices. When will it come, when will it once more gush from the rock, that ever-awaited spring of fresh and charming inspiration? It is not quite with the spring-time of poetry as it is with the spring-times of nature. Every year, in April, the birds sing; for all I know they sing at pretty well the same songs, it is enough that they commence, to our delight; but in art it is absolutely necessary to change the tunes. To-day however, I will speak of two poets who have sung with some freshness; one of whom already has a name, a name consecrated by a lamentable death, the other of whom is in better voice than ever, and is at this moment enjoying a certain vogue: Hégésippe Moreau and Pierre Dupont.

These two poets, whom I do not intend to match or to bring more closely together than is expedient, are both connected, by their origins, with that pretty town of Provins, the town of old ruins and roses; and these same

<sup>1</sup> Hégésippe Moreau, *Le Myosotis*, nouvelle édition, 1 vol. (Masgana).—Pierre Dupont, *Chants et Poésies*, 1 vol. (Garnier frères).

roses a poet, Thibaut, Count of Champagne, brought from Asia on his return from a crusade : that was a good deed. The two plebeian songsters, successors in their way of the feudal minstrel, spent a portion of their childhood in that pretty valley in which neither had his cradle, and they breathed early, and in their best season, the perfume o' that fresh landscape which invites to a sweet and natural poetry.

Hégésippe Moreau, born at Paris in April 1810, was the son of a man who became professor at the Collège de Provins, and was taken as quite a child to that town. His birth was irregular, although he knew his parents. He lost his father in early life : his mother took a situation with a lady of Provins, Mme Guérard, who afterwards became Mme Favier, and the child was taken up by that benevolent lady, and grew up in her house ; the sons of the house especially took a tender interest in him. He had begun to attend classes at the Collège de Provins, when circumstances obliged his benefactors to leave the town and live in the country. He was then placed, first in the little Seminary at Meaux, then in that of Avon, near Fontainebleau, where he obtained his education, an excellent classical education, not forgetting Latin verses, which he varied and turned upon all the rhythms of Horace. When he left college, his mother was no longer alive ; he might have thought himself an orphan in the world, and forsaken ; but no, that would have been an injustice, as he himself has told us :

Car de l'école à peine eus-je franchi les grilles,  
Que je tombai joyeux aux bras de deux familles.

Mme Favier, who had retired to Champ-Benoist, still continued to look after him ; he was besides treated with particular affection and delicacy by her daughter-in-law, Mme Guérard, who took him in at her farm of Saint-Martin : Moreau consecrated the memory of this hospitality in his charming song *La Fermière*. About the time of his leaving college, he was apprenticed to M. Lebeau the printer, who still has his business at Provins. The daughter of the latter, Mlle Louise Lebeau (now Mme J.), is the same whom he so purely and so chastely celebrated under the name *ma sœur* in some of his prettiest poems,

and to whom he dedicated his *Contes*. 'I dwelt, he says somewhere, in quite a little printing-shop, but so neat, so dainty, so hospitable; you know it, my sister.' *Mon cœur*, he says again:

Mon cœur, ivre à seize ans de volupté céleste,  
S'emplit d'un chaste amour dont le parfum lui reste.  
J'ai rêvé le bonheur, mais le rêve fut court.

In these years we see a primitive, pure, natural, youthful, not a fretful, irreligious Hégésippe Moreau, in all the flower of his sensibility and goodness, animated with every generous instinct and not yet infected by the maladies of the age. A unique and rapid moment which he tried more than once to recover, to retrace in his verses, and where we now find his sweetest phrases. So there is in each of us, provided that our nature be fundamentally good, a primitive, ideal being, designed by nature with her lightest and most maternal hand, but which man too often conceals, stifles or corrupts. Those who have known and loved us under that primitive form continue to see us thus, and if we have the good fortune to have a sister who has herself continued to live a simple and even life, a life faithful to memories, she will keep us for ever present in that youthful purity, she will keep alive the altar-flame in her heart, and worship us as we used to be under that first lovable and chaste form. That *ourselves* of former days, which often, alas! is no longer actually in us, subsists in her and lives like one of Fra Bartolommeo's angels painted over the altar in the oratory.

Hégésippe Moreau had that good fortune in the midst of all his misfortunes, and to-day, if we question about the poet her whom he then called his *sister*, she will reply by showing in the background of her memory that Moreau of sixteen, 'with the most delicate and noble soul, of an exquisite sensibility, with tears for every pure and pious emotion.'

I take a pleasure in remarking these early traits, because those who praised Moreau most highly at the hour of his death represented him above all as a poet of war, of hatred and anger. He had indeed become so in too great a degree, but he was not so at first nor as essentially as they would lead us to suppose. Stretched on his death-bed



at the Charity Hospital, the character which was most deeply imprinted on his face, as I am told by a person who saw him on that day only, was one of remarkable gentleness.

In speaking here of Hégésippe Moreau, I do not intend, as may be well believed, to call either society or the poets to account. Poets are a race apart, a most interesting race when they are sincere, when they are not given (as so often happens) to imitation and aping; but at no time has that delicate or sublime race appeared to be distinguished by a very accurate and practical knowledge of reality. With regard to society, that is to say the generality of men united together and established in civilization, they expect us to imitate them at our first arrival, to follow them into their ready-traced circle, or, if we wish to go outside of it, that then, to justify that pretension and that exception, we serve them openly or amuse them; and until they have discovered this singular gift of charm or this merit of great usefulness, they are naturally very indifferent and occupied with their own affairs. Can we be surprised at it?

Hégésippe Moreau, on his entry into life, had however, as we have seen, met with two families who were more than disposed to receive and almost to adopt him. At his first step in the world, and outside of his first circle, he likewise found support. M. Lebrun, the author of *Marie Stuart* and our colleague in the Academy, is not a native of Provins, but he has long belonged to it by his habits and by family ties. A man who is universally known as a talented poet, but whose nobility and delicacy of heart is known only to those who have come into contact with him, he considered it his duty, as the first to arrive, to stretch out a hand to those who came after, and we find him assisting at the début of both Hégésippe Moreau and of Pierre Dupont. Moreau already became known to M. Lebrun in 1828; he was then eighteen years of age: it was at the moment when Charles X returned from a journey which M. de Martignac had made him undertake. The King passed through Provins, and on this occasion Moreau composed his patriotic song with the title *Vive le Roi!* and the refrain *Vive la Liberté!* I have before me a few manuscript poems addressed about this period by the young man to M. Lebrun, or written by his

advice, notably one in honour of La Fayette after his triumphal voyage to America. At this epoch Moreau came to Paris and, again by M. Lebrun's advice, he addressed to M. Didot his *Épître sur l'Imprimerie*, which may be read among his Poems, and in which we find some pretty descriptive lines :

Au lieu de fatiguer la plume vigilante,  
De consumer sans cesse une activité lente  
A reproduire en vain ces écrits fugitifs,  
Abattus dans leur vol par les ans destructifs ;  
Pour donner une forme, un essor aux pensées,  
Des signes voyageurs, sous des mains exercées,  
Vont saisir en courant leur place dans un mot ;  
Sur ce métal uni l'encre passe, et bientôt,  
Sortant multiplié de la presse rapide,  
Le discours parle aux yeux sur une feuille humide.

But the end of the Epistle is especially happy ; the young compositor shows himself frequently consumed with the desire to write, to *compose* on his own account, whilst he is obliged to print others :

Hélas ! pourquoi faut-il qu'aveuglant la jeunesse,  
Comme tous les plaisirs, l'étude ait son ivresse ?  
Les chefs-d'œuvre du goût, par mes soins reproduits,  
Ont occupé mes jours, ont enchanté mes nuits,  
Et souvent, insensé ! j'ai répandu des larmes,  
Semblable au forgeron qui, préparant des armes,  
Avide des exploits qu'il ne partage pas,  
Siffle un air belliqueux et rêve des combats. . . .

Moreau was at this time only nineteen years of age. He was taken into M. Didot's printing-office in the Rue Jacob, just opposite the Charity Hospital, where since then . . .—Having been appointed, shortly after July 1830, to the directorship of the Royal Printing-press, M. Lebrun tried to get Moreau into it ; but the latter, having left Didot's establishment, was now following a different path, and he was not one of those who are ready to be patronised.

Moreau keenly felt the secret torments of that poverty which La Bruyère has described so well, and which makes a man shame-faced, for fear of being ridiculous. So, the first time he was to have seen M. Lebrun at Provins, he would not call upon him because he had on *blue stockings*. He was not cured of this disposition even in Paris, when the most

real privations, when positive and poignant sufferings added their sting.

He has been described to me as already touched at that time by the breath of irritation and bitterness which is so soon felt under the deceptive Parisian suns, as suspicious, ready to take umbrage, especially disposed to resent anything that had the appearance of patronage, having a *disdain* and *fear* of patronage; no longer to be tamed as he had been a few years before at Provins; having in short already contracted that malady of self-esteem and susceptibility which is peculiar to the time, the malady of the aristocratic René as well as of the plebeian Oberman or the worldly Adolphe, that above all of Jean-Jacques, which has appeared since them in so many others who had the same malady under different forms and varieties. It would ill become the present writer to be too severe, having suffered from it in his day and even described it in his younger years. Moreau was then sick of what I may call the current small-pox of his time; he was discontented, shy, embittered, avoiding or repelling whatever might have been possible, desiring something different from that which offered, and unable to define that *something different*. Poor, bashful and proud, and twenty years of age, one readily adopts the burning doctrines which promise the upheaval of the present and the impeachment of the future, just as at fifty years, settled down and sedate, after exhausting the passions, and reasoning more or less at ease on the divers changes, one is naturally in favour of a wiser *status quo*. Our wisdom or our folly is as a rule little more than the result of our age and our circumstances. To rise above these so to say material and physical circumstances, two things are necessary, and they are rare: *character* and *principles*. Hégésippe Moreau had neither; he had soul and talent, but his character was weak, as is too often the case with artistic organisations, and outside impressions took a strong and irresistible hold upon him. His poems and his inspirations, from the moment that they cease to be intimate, are for the most part only the ardent and mixed reflex, the conflict of divers lightning-flashes which were then tempestuously crossing each other in the political atmosphere.

After the events of July 1830, in which he had valiantly

taken part, Moreau gave up printing for a time; he became a school usher, but that was no career. During this fatal and feverish period of two or three years he fell into an irregular, disorderly, erratic life, a life of emotions and convulsions. He suffered hunger, and he composed songs at this time which, in their harshness and bitterness, re-echoed that inner cry. He thought of suicide; he began to go to ruin. In 1833 he had a first illness which forced him to go into hospital. When convalescent he had a happy idea; he started for Provins and asked hospitality of Mme Guérard at the farm of Saint-Martin. There, in the last rays of autumn, reviewing his painful memories, those of his sickness, of the insurrection and seditions, and of the cholera, recalling even his angry imprecations, he had a pathetic repentance:

Ainsi je m'égarais à des vœux imprudents,  
Et j'attisais de pleurs mes jambes ardents.  
Je haïssais alors, car la souffrance irrite;  
Mais un peu de bonheur m'a converti bien vite.  
Pour que son vers clément pardonne au genre humain,  
Que faut-il au poète? Un baiser et du pain.  
Dieu ménagea le vent à ma pauvreté nue;  
Mais le siècle d'airain pour d'autres continue. . . .

And considering himself free of cares at the approach of winter, he wished others the same relief and the same tranquillity:

Dieu, révèle-toi bon pour tous comme pour moi !  
Que ta manne, en tombant, étouffe le blasphème ;  
Empêche de souffrir, puisque tu veux qu'on aime ;  
Pour qu'à tes fils élus, tes fils déshérités  
Ne lancent plus d'en bas des regards irrités.  
Aux petits des oiseaux toi qui donnes pâture,  
Nourris toutes les faims ; à tout dans la nature  
Que ton hiver soit doux ; et, son règne fini,  
Le poète et l'oiseau chanteront : Sois béni !

Two years after, the memory of this sweet hospitality came back to him, and he sent as a New Year's present (January 1836) this delightful Romance to the lady to whom he owed, for a day at least, his pure and innocent Charmettes :

## LA FERMIÈRE.

Amour à la fermière ! elle est  
Si gentille et si douce !  
C'est l'oiseau des bois qui se plaît  
Loin du bruit dans la mousse.  
Vieux vagabond qui tends la main,  
Enfant pauvre et sans mère,  
Puissiez-vous trouver en chemin  
La ferme et la fermière !  
De l'escabeau vide au foyer  
Là le pauvre s'empare,  
Et le grand bahut de noyer  
Pour lui n'est point avare ;  
C'est là qu'un jour je vins m'asseoir,  
Les pieds blancs de poussière ;  
Un jour . . . puis en marche ! et bonsoir  
La ferme et la fermière !

Mon seul bon jour a dû finir,  
Finir dès son aurore ;  
Mais pour moi ce doux souvenir  
Est du bonheur encore :  
En fermant les yeux je revois  
L'enclos plein de lumière,  
La haie en fleur, le petit bois,  
La ferme et la fermière !

Si Dieu, comme notre curé  
Au prône le répète,  
Pais un bienfait (même égaré),  
Ah ! qu'il songe à ma dette !  
Qu'il prodigue au vallon des fleurs,  
La joie à la chaumière,  
Et garde des vents et des pleurs  
La ferme et la fermière !

Chaque hiver, qu'un groupe d'enfants  
A son fuseau sourie,  
Comme les Anges aux fils blancs  
De la Vierge Marie ;  
Que tous, par la main, pas à pas,  
Guidant un petit frère,  
Réjouissent de leurs ébats  
La ferme et la fermière !

## Envoi.

Ma Chansonnette, prends ton vol !  
Tu n'es qu'un faible hommage ;

Mais qu'en avril le rossignol  
 Chante et la dédommage.  
 Qu'effrayé par ses chants d'amour,  
 L'oiseau du cimetière  
 Longtemps, longtemps se taise pour  
 La ferme et la fermière !

What Moreau needed, in common with all gentle and weak, shy and timid, tender and grateful poets, was a wife, a sister, a mother, some loving woman who would have dispensed him from everything except singing, loving and dreaming.

Meanwhile, with returning health, necessity, and with it the genius or the demon that does not pardon, again seized hold of him. It was the moment of Barthélemy's great success, and his *Némésis* here and there gave rise to imitations and copies which were characterised by little more than violent language. Hégésippe Moreau essayed at Provins a *Némésis* of his own, a journal in verse with the title of *Diogène*, an ill-favoured patron saint whom he had adopted for some time, and whom the sweet autumn passed at Saint-Martin had not quite made him abjure. The talent which was displayed in it could not save a publication which would have been very venturesome anywhere, and which was especially so in the midst of the rivalries and susceptibilities of a little town. In vain did he appeal to the whole district of Brie and Champagne, and exclaim :

Qu'il me vienne un public ! ma poésie est mûre,

the public gave little response. The poet wounded and alienated even those who had at first supported him. He finally had a duel, and was soon obliged to return to Paris, disappointed anew and irritated as after a check.

From 1834 to 1838, his life was one painful and panning struggle, in which his talent, though it was becoming every day more and more real and independent, was unable to surmount the hardness of circumstances or make up for the weakness of his character. Let it suffice to recall the fact that, at the very moment when he had found a publisher for his poems, and when the *Myosotis*, published with luxury (1838) and already favourably received by the journals, was about to bring him fame, Hégésippe Moreau was admitted without any resources into the Charity Hospital,

where he died on the 20 December 1838, recalling Gilbert's lamentable example and forming a too faithful pendant to *Chatterton's* touching drama, the impression of which was still quite fresh on the younger generation. He was not yet twenty-nine years of age.

If we consider to-day Hégésippe Moreau's talent and poetry in cold blood and without any other end in view but that of art and truth, this will be, I think, our conclusion. Moreau is a poet; he is a poet by heart, by imagination, by style: but when he died none of this was quite finished and accomplished. These three essential qualities of the poet had not come to a full and entire fusion. If he had lived he would in all probability have become a master, but he was not so as yet. Imitation of three poets is visible in him and shows itself by turns: imitation of André Chénier in his iambics, above all imitation of Barthélemy in satire, and imitation of Béranger in song. In this latter kind however, although he recalls Béranger, Moreau has a character of his own, very natural, very frank and very poetic; he is dramatic, he has gaiety and playfulness, sometimes a little free, but so light and lively that we pardon him. Read again *Le Joli Costume*, *Les Modistes hospitalières*. Among the serious poems which appear to me best qualified to illustrate his qualities and his defects is that which is entitled: *Un quart d'heure de dévotion*. The poet, who boasted of being with André Chénier and Vergniaud a *pagan of Attica*, who was too often impious, irreverent to the extent of being insulting, has however a return to better feelings. One day when he felt sad he entered the church of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont. He entered in a moment of idleness at first, curious to see and admire the marvels of elegant and delicate architecture that this pretty church offers:

Et la rougeur au front je l'avouerais moi-même . . .  
 Dans le temple au hasard j'aventurais mes pas,  
 Et j'effleurais l'autel et je ne priais pas.

But insensibly he recalls the time when, in his early childhood, he prayed, and even served the priest at the altar:

Autrefois pour prier, mes lèvres enfantines  
 D'elles-mêmes s'ouvraient aux syllabes latines,

Et j'allais aux grands jours, blanc lévite du chœur,  
 Répandre devant Dieu ma corbeille et mon cœur.  
 Mais depuis. . . . .

And he enumerates the different ways of going astray  
 and falling, among which was his own :

Combien de jeunes cœurs que le doute rongea !  
 Combien de jeunes fronts qu'il sillonne déjà !  
 Le doute aussi m'accable, hélas ! et j'y succombe :  
 Mon âme fatiguée est comme la colombe  
 Sur le flot du désert égarant son essor ;  
 Et l'olivier sauveur ne fleurit pas encor. . . .

Ces mille souvenirs couraient dans ma mémoire,  
 Et je balbutiai :—' Seigneur, faites-moi croire !'  
 Quand soudain sur mon front passa ce vent glacé  
 Qui sur le front de Job autrefois a passé.  
 Le vent d'hiver pleura sous le parvis sonore,  
 Et soudain je sentis que je gardais encore  
 Dans le fond de mon cœur, de moi-même ignoré,  
 Un peu de vieille foi, parfum évaporé.

Under this inner impression, under the ray of this recovered fervour, the poet, kneeling before Racine's tomb (which is in this church), makes a vow. This vow is not to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but to go there in imagination and in poetry, to recount in his way, in a series of cantos, some of the sacred subjects, probably something resembling what M. Victor de Laprade did since in his evangelical Poems. With the humble thought that some spark might fly to the souls of others from this modestly accomplished work, the poet recalls to mind and applies to himself a charming fabliau which his Breton grandmother, as he said, had often related to him. Now this is the fabliau : One day God in his designs allowed the element of life, fire, to withdraw suddenly from the atmosphere, so that nature was deprived of it. Great and sudden terror among the birds. All are terrified, dismayed, scared. The vultures become more wicked with terror, and fight more fiercely than ever. The nightingale loses heart, and, after singing her last song, hides her head in her nest. Even the eagle, though accustomed to bear the thunder-bolt, lets it go out and drop from his claws. In this universal agony a single bird, the smallest, the humblest of all, the little wren, is not disheartened but



flies so high that he reaches the heavens, recovers the spark and brings it back to the world. But he was consumed in the act.

We can imagine all the elevation, poetry and pathos that such a poem might have; but what does it lack to be a master-piece? It lacks purity and good taste in its style. Quite at the opening the poet describes the curious art-lover entering Saint-Etienne, regarding and admiring the sculptures and paintings:

*Époussetant de l'œil chaque peinture usée.*

Elsewhere he speaks of the book of the Gospels:

Page de vérité qu'à sa ligne dernière  
Le Golgotha tremblant *sabla* de sa poussière.

So again, in another poem, describing Tasso's entry into Rome under a shower of wreaths and flowers, he says:

Le pauvre fou sentit, dans la ville papale,  
Une *douche* de fleurs inonder son front pâle.

*Épousseter, sabler, douche de fleurs*, there we have the detestable modern style, the material, pretentious and gross style, which one would truly never think of going to seek so near the tomb of Racine, and which, I venture to say, should never have tainted and burdened the cradle of our Romantic School, such at least as I have always conceived it to be. Yes, it was possible to show oneself nearer to nature, to simple, modest and sentient reality, than were our illustrious classical poets, without dropping into this heavy, veneered and technical style, which prevails almost everywhere to-day. Hégésippe Moreau committed the error of sacrificing to it too much at the beginning, and he did not live long enough to free himself from it and throw it off.

We are told however that, towards the end, he was quite cured of the illusion which had been cast over him by certain material and mechanical poets or rhymesters, who were robust rather than really powerful.

One of his irreproachable pieces, which one is always fond of quoting, is his *Flegy* to the Voulzie, a pretty river or streamlet of the country where he passed his childhood,

*Bluet éclos parmi les roses de Provins.*

We could not speak fittingly of Moreau, if we did not recall at every mention of him these delightful lines, in which he renovated so to say his talent and his soul :

S'il est un nom bien doux, fait pour la poésie,  
Oh ! dites, n'est-ce pas le nom de la Voulzie ?  
La Voulzie, est-ce un fleuve aux grandes îles ? Non ;  
Mais, avec un murmure aussi doux que son nom,  
Un tout petit ruisseau coulant visible à peine ;  
Un géant altéré le boirait d'une haleine ;  
Le nain vert Obéron, jouant au bord des flots,  
Sauterait par dessus sans mouiller ses grelots.  
Mais j'aime la Voulzie et ses bois noirs de mûres,  
Et dans son lit de fleurs ses bonds et ses murmures.  
Enfant, j'ai bien souvent, à l'ombre des buissons,  
Dans le langage humain traduit ces vagues sons ;  
Pauvre écolier rêveur et qu'on disait sauvage,  
Quand j'émiettai mon pain à l'oiseau du rivage,  
L'onde semblait me dire : ' Espère ! aux mauvais jours,  
Dieu te rendra ton pain.'—Dieu me le doit toujours !

And recalling all his misfortunes, his grievous losses, all his disappointments and even his angers, he adds with a tender feeling which we should wish to have been more habitual with him :

Pourtant je te pardonne, ô ma Voulzie ! et même,  
Triste, j'ai tant besoin d'un confident qui m'aime,  
Me parle avec douceur et me trompe, qu'avant  
De clore au jour mes yeux battus d'un si long vent,  
Je veux faire à tes bords un saint pèlerinage,  
Revoir tous les buissons si chers à mon jeune âge,  
Dormir encore au bruit de tes roseaux chanteurs,  
Et causer d'avenir avec tes flots menteurs.

If Moreau pardoned the Voulzie, these charming verses also make us pardon him much. We will throw a veil over his weaknesses and his errors ; we should like to abolish every trace of certain distressing blots of his Muse. He himself, in a poem called *To my Soul*, exhorting it to fly heavenwards, and to leave the body that it has too often sullied, says to it :

Fuis, Ame blanche, un corps malade et nu ;  
Fuis en chantant vers le monde inconnu !  
Fuis sans trembler : veuf d'une sainte amie  
Quand du plaisir j'ai senti le besoin,  
De mes erreurs, toi, Colombe endormie,  
Tu n'as été complice ni témoin.

Ne trouvant pas la manne qu'elle implore, c  
 Ma faim mordit la poussière (insensé !);  
 Mais toi, mon Ame, à Dieu, ton fiancé,  
 Tu peux demain te dire vierge encore !

We see that Moreau renews in one point the indulgent doctrine of certain mystics, who do not make the soul responsible and a party to the absences and distractions of the body. I do not quote this as correct theology, but as charming poetry.

Hégésippe Moreau's prose Tales are quite pure and irreproachable; they might even be separated from the rest of his works and sold in a special volume for the benefit of young girls and children. In them we see the bottom of his soul and his imagination laid bare in his smiling hours and his happy seasons. Such he was when with his *sister*, at sixteen, before admitting into his mind any bitter and insulting thoughts. To *relate* was no less a calling with him than to sing:

Je préfère un conte en novembre  
 Au doux murmure du printemps.

Pity, the brotherly feeling carried to the point of a cultus, the most exquisite feminine compassion, breathe in *Le Gui de chêne* (*The Oak mistletoe*). The tender weakness which needs a support, the sufferings and martyrdom of a delicate being, are found mingled with a sprightliness and pretty wantonness in *La Souris blanche* (*The White Mouse*); it is the prettiest and most touching of fairy-tales; it is less naïve than Perrault, but equally light and agreeable, and cannot be read to the end without a tear through the smile. What do you say of that *Fée des Pleurs* (*Fairy of Tears*), the comforter of the afflicted, who flits rather than walks over the points of the grass and the flowers? 'She had adopted this kind of motion, for fear, she said to those who expressed their surprise, of wetting her shoes in the dew, but really because she feared to crush and wound unawares the grasshopper chirping in the meadows and the lizard wriggling in the sun-light; for she was so lavish of her attentions and her love, the good fairy! that she distributed them among the humblest creatures of God.' Such was Moreau, as he appears to us before his political phase, before his extreme poverty, before his bitterness; such he was again no doubt at his last hour,

and at the approach of the great moment which elevates and calms the beautiful soul. We can fancy, when we read these pretty tales and that of *Les Petits Souliers* (*The Little Shoes*), and even that of *Thérèse Sureau*, when we see such imagination, such gaiety, such invention of details, how charming he must have been when he dared to be familiar and consented to be happy,

In depicting him I have endeavoured to separate his poetic and natural figure from the burning questions and the party declamations with which he has been so much associated. I should like to do the same in the few rapid words I have to say of M. Pierre Dupont, who is at once a songster of the people and the drawing-rooms, a pure socialist if we are to go by some of his poems, rustic, countrified and pacific, I believe, when he shows his best and original nature. M. Pierre Dupont was born at Lyons on the 23 April 1821; his father was of Provins, his mother of Lyons. His first poems were devoted to the celebration of Provins, of the Voulzie, of the traces of Hégésippe Moreau; with these he frequently mingled memories of the Rhône and the Saône, of the green *willow avenues* where he had played in his childhood. His sympathies with family life and with the country were early developed in him. He has a sister and a brother who are made known to us through his Poems; one of his prettiest pieces is entitled *Ma Sœur*. Through his father and grandfather he belongs to the artisan class, and he was able to study the most honourable and laborious side of their life. Having lost his mother at the age of four years, the young Pierre Dupont was taken up by his godfather and cousin, an old priest who had his presbytery at La-Roche-Taillée-sur-Saône. There he began an education without restraint, which was continued and terminated at the little Seminary of Largentière. But have you not remarked how all these plebeian and popular poets have had their early education in an ecclesiastical establishment? On his return to Lyons after his studies, he was placed in a bank; the dreamy evening promenades on the banks of the Rhône only half compensated him for the mortifications of the day and the office drudgery. His grandfather sometimes invited him to Saint-Brice near Provins, where he lived. It was there, at Provins, that at the time of his conscription, he saw M. Lebrun, who

discerned the poet, interested himself in him, started a subscription list for his poems among the people of the town, and by this means released him from the military service to which he was about to be subjected. M. Lebrun, still on the occasion of the same volume of poetry (*Les deux Anges*, 1844), proposed him and had him accepted by the French Academy for the prize founded by M. de Maille-Latour-Landry. M. Dupont had besides in the offices of the Institute a little post which associated him for some time as assistant with the labours of the Dictionary. M. Dupont's first poems breathe on every page the gratitude with which a conduct so generous and so sustained on the part of his first patron inspired him. I take a pleasure in remarking both the favours and the gratitude, to show that in this case, there can be less occasion than in any other for all the declamations with which people are pleased to accuse society en masse in the name of unrecognised talent. On a certain day however, M. Pierre Dupont felt that the demon within him was stronger than rule and method; he broke or loosened his light chain, and I do not blame him for it; he wished to be entirely free and independent, without being less grateful for the past. Meanwhile, with a power of vivid, expansive and tender expression, he was feeling his way, and he was preparing to attempt the drama; he was still seeking his proper vein, when the unexpected success of the song *Les Bœufs*, one day composed at random, opened to him quite a vista:

J'ai deux grands bœufs dans mon étable,  
Deux grands bœufs blancs marqués de roux, etc.

Many pretty mouths immediately began to repeat with full voice this piquant and naïve (half-naïve) cantilena of the ploughman, and the poet felt that he had but to continue to sing in this tone about country things, slightly arranged for the use of the towns and the drawing-rooms, without however forgetting his beginnings. He composed a few more of his pretty rustic melodies: *La Mère Jeanne*, *Ma Vigne*, *Le Cochon*, *La Vache blanche*, which were soon on everybody's lips.

These songs form properly speaking a pendant and accompaniment to the kind of rustic and idyllic epopee which Mme Sand was at the same period bringing into vogue with her novels *François le Champi*, *La Mare-au-Diable* and

*La Petite Fadette*. Mme Sand relates, describes and paints; she provides the drama. Pierre Dupont leads the chorus and fills the interludes with his songs.

At the same period (take note of it), before February 1848 M. Pierre Dupont was also writing the *Chanson du Pain*, one day when bread was dear, and *Le Chant des Ouvriers*. Whilst intending merely to gladden and comfort the workers, he exalted them in refrains which are a little vague. We may say that he composed that sort of things spontaneously at the time, from a feeling of sympathy for those whose ways he had closely observed. There was not yet too much intention in them.

However the February Revolution broke out and threw some perturbation into these Songs, some of which were very near becoming burning and quite inciting. Here we will say candidly and with all the esteem that his fundamentally amiable and well-meaning nature inspires, M. Pierre Dupont more than once allowed himself to be carried away. Open to impressions and variable in his moods, he reflected the echoes around him, and lent his voice to them. He opened all his sails to the popular wind which drove him along: he followed rather than guided his success. In his Collection now published there is a sort of prophetic Song, entitled: 1852, which resounds with many magnificent and hollow promises:

Voici la fin de la misère,  
Mangeurs de pain noir, buveurs d'eau!

To tell the people that is mischievous, to help them to sing it is still worse. It is not a question here of republicanism, but of good faith and good sense. What! can you seriously maintain that 1852, merely because it impeaches everything, will be the end of all miseries? Very well! what one would not dare to say and articulate in prose should not be sung.

But, in general, the character of M. Pierre Dupont's songs is of a better kind, of a nature more in conformity with that of the poet and the man, as he showed himself in his first poems. The proper character of the popular Muse is that she should be before all pacific, comforting, loving; that the song of each trade, for example, should express the joy, the pride even and the sweet satisfaction the worker takes in it; that it should accompany and

relieve the labour ; that it should mark the moments of it and make them lighter and more cheerful. How comes it, says Horace in his first Satire, that nobody is content with his lot and his condition, and that we always envy that of our neighbour ? The effect of the song of each trade should be, on the other hand, to make every one, while he is singing it, innerly contented, even proud of his profession and decidedly prefer it to any other, without however any contempt, any insult or bitterness. It is right to remember that we find some of these cordial intentions realised in the Collection of an artisan poet, in the *Chansons de chaque métier*, by Charles Poncy of Toulon.<sup>1</sup> M. Pierre Dupont has also very well understood and rendered with animation that spirit of joy, of emulation and sympathy, in his *Chanson de la Soie*, in *Le Tisserand* and others.

From the literary point of view, M. Pierre Dupont's songs would lose by being separated from their melodies, which are for the most part of his own invention or arrangement, and which, though he knows little of music, he finds and combines with a natural facility and a good taste which is an evident sign of a vocation. One should hear him singing them himself : he begins with some difficulty in a hoarse, rather broken voice, which soon however becomes captivating. After the first half-hour, he warms to his work, he expands, he has full command of his resources ; he enjoys the impression he makes and imparts his joy to others. A deep and sincere feeling breathes in the little devices even and the little by-play which every artist indulges in. A rustic melancholy, nonchalance and bonhomie, but not too much emphasized, that fashion of singing as if he were returning from the fields, he knows all that without any feigning, and better than a singer by profession. When once he holds his audience, he keeps them, he makes them his own and adapts himself to them. At a given moment he will produce his whole effect. Without any prejudice to the other conditions of the branch of song which he has created, I should wish him always to pay strict attention to the *style*, the only quality that is able to make written poetry live and to secure it a future when the fleeting voice is past.

<sup>1</sup> I will indicate, among others, the song called *Le Forgeron*, which M. Eugène Ortolan set to music.

To give an idea of the easy and graceful turn which is familiar to M. Dupont, I will quote only a few lines of his which are already old. One day he went to call upon M. Hugo, whom he did not then know, at the Place-Royale. Not finding him in, he took a turn in the square and wrote the following lines in pencil on his card, which he delivered at his house immediately after :

Si tu voyais une anémone,  
Languissante et près de périr,  
Te demander, comme une aumône,  
Une goutte d'eau pour fleurir ;

Si tu voyais une hirondelle,  
Un jour d'hiver, te supplier,  
A ta vitre battre de l'aile,  
Demander place à ton foyer ;

L'hirondelle aurait sa retraite,  
L'anémone sa goutte d'eau :  
Pour toi que ne suis-je, ô Poète,  
Ou l'humble fleur ou l'humble oiseau !

All who know M. Pierre Dupont describe him to me as a gentle, poetic soul, naturally loving what is good, a sincere lover of nature and the country. ' Will you come and see the crops at Vaugirard ? ' he said one day to one of his Parisian friends.—To see the green or ripe crops was for him an end and a pleasure. In his *Chanson des Prés* he said, expressing all the charm of his subject :

Bélements et mugissements,  
Là vous me plaisez davantage ;  
Les airs des pâtres sont charmants  
Dans la senteur du pâturage.

He has, according to those who know him, a warm and affectionate heart, and is gifted with rich qualities. He has charm and fascination ; he might easily acquire refinement. His danger lies in that disposition to yield to the passing inspiration. Every poet should obey his inspiration, but the inspiration must come from within.

And to sum up, not indeed my judgment (that would be premature), but my whole desire with regard to him, I will say : He is at this moment in the fashion, he possesses what so many others, and the most worthy, have all their lives awaited in vain, the attention and the eye of



the public ; he has the *cry* of the moment, as the poet says ; he sings for hours, he is listened to and applauded ; he has action. Let him use it like a true artist and a true friend of his country , for he will be called upon to render an account of it.

## MONTAIGNE <sup>1</sup>

WHILST the good ship of France is sailing a little at random, entering unknown seas and preparing to double what our pilots (if indeed there is a pilot) call, in anticipation, the Cape of Storms, whilst the look-out man at the mast-head thinks he already sees the spectre of the giant Adamastor rising up on the horizon, many honest and peaceful minds persist in their labours and studies, and to the best of their powers follow up their favourite idea to the very end. At this very moment I know of a learned scholar who is comparing more eagerly than ever the various early editions of Rabelais, editions (be it well noted) of which only a single copy survives, of which a second copy is supposed to be undiscoverable; this attentive collation of texts will no doubt have some important literary, perhaps a philosophical, result with regard to the genius of our Lucian-Aristophanes. I know of another savant, whose devotion and cult are directed in quite another quarter, to Bossuet, and who is preparing a complete, exact and circumstantial History of the life and works of the great bishop. And since tastes vary, and *human fancies are divided* in a hundred ways, as Montaigne says, the latter also has his devotees, he who was so little of a devotee himself: he is forming a sect. Even during his life-time, he had his *fille d'alliance*, Mademoiselle de Gournay, who solemnly consecrated herself to his service, and his disciple Charron, who followed his steps more closely, hardly doing more than arrange his thoughts with more order and method. In our days, amateurs, men of intellect, have kept up this religion in a different form; they have devoted their lives to collecting the slightest vestiges, the smallest relics, of the author of the *Essays*; at the head

<sup>1</sup> New Documents on Montaigne, collected and published by Dr Payen (1850).

of this group it is reasonable to place Dr Payen, who has for years been preparing a book on Montaigne, of which the title will be as follows :

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE, *a Collection of hitherto unpublished or little known particulars about the author of the ESSAYS, his book and his other writings, on his family, his friends, his admirers and his contemners.*

Pending the completion of such a book, the occupation and diversion of a life-time, Dr Payen keeps us in touch, in short pamphlets, with the various works and discoveries concerning Montaigne.

If these little discoveries, made during the last five or six years, are sorted from among all the quarrels, disputes, frauds, chicanes and law-suits (for there have been all these), with which they have been mixed up, it will be seen that they consist in the following :

In 1846, M. Macé found among the manuscripts of the (then) Royal Library, Collection Du Puy, a letter of Montaigne to King Henri IV, dated the 2 September 1590.

In 1847, M. Payen published a letter or fragment of a letter of Montaigne dated the 16 February 1588, altered moreover and incomplete, originally in the collection of the Countess Boni de Castellane.

But above all in 1848, M. Horace de Viel-Castel found in London, in the British Museum, a noteworthy letter from Montaigne, then Mayor of Bordeaux, to M. de Matignon, the King's Lieutenant in that same city, dated the 22 May 1585. This letter is interesting in that it shows us for the first time Montaigne in the full exercise of his office, and in all the activity and vigilance he was capable of. This self-styled idler had, when the need arose, far more of those active qualities than he promised.

M. Detcheverry, Archivist (Keeper of the Records) to the Mayoralty of Bordeaux, found and published (1850) a letter from Montaigne, who was still Mayor, to the *Jurats* or Aldermen of the town, dated the 30 July 1585.

M. Achille Jubinal found among the Manuscripts in the National Library, and published in 1850, a long and remarkable letter from Montaigne to King Henri IV, dated the 18 January 1590, which forms a happy addition to the letter already found by M. Macé.

Lastly, to omit nothing and to do justice to all, in a *Visit to the Château of Montaigne in Périgord*, the account

of which appeared in 1850, Dr Bertrand de Saint-Germain has described the places and noted down the various inscriptions, in Greek or Latin, which are still to be read in Montaigne's tower, that room in the *third* story (the ground-floor counting as the first) in which the philosopher had established his library and study.

Uniting and appraising in his last pamphlet these divers notices and discoveries, which are not all of equal importance, Dr Payen himself indulges in a little excess of admiration; but far be it from us to reproach him with it. Admiration, when given to subjects so noble, so perfectly harmless and disinterested, is really a spark of the sacred fire: it spurs a man to undertake researches which a cooler zeal would quickly have dropped, and which sometimes end in substantial results. However, those who, like M. Payen, have the strong feeling of admiration for Montaigne common to men of intellect, should deign to remember, even in the height of their passion, the advice of the sage and master: 'It is more difficult, said Montaigne, speaking of the commentators of his day, to interpret the interpretations than to interpret the things; and there are more books on books than on any other subject: we do nothing but *gloss each other*. Commentators swarm on all sides: of authors there is great dearth.' *Authors* are indeed priceless and very rare at all times, that is to say, those who really add to the treasure of human knowledge. I could wish that all those who write on Montaigne, and give us the full benefit of their researches and discoveries, would imagine one thing, namely Montaigne himself reading and criticising them. 'What would he think of me and the manner in which I am going to speak of him to the public?' How many empty phrases and idle discussions such a question, if put to ourselves, would cut short! M. Payen's last pamphlet is dedicated to a man who has also deserved well of Montaigne, M. Gustave Brunet of Bordeaux. The latter, in a work in which he makes known some interesting corrections or alternative readings of the text of Montaigne, says, speaking in his turn of M. Payen: 'If he decides at last to publish the fruits of his researches, there will be nothing left for the future *Montaignologues* to do.' *Montaignologues*! Good Heavens! what would Montaigne have said to such a word coined in

his honour ? O all ye who are so meritoriously occupied with him, but who do not, I should hope, claim to monopolise him, in the name of him you love, and whom we all love with more or less reason, never, I pray you, use such words, which savour of sects and fraternities, of pedantic erudition and *scholastic cackle*, things which more than anything were repugnant to him.

Montaigne had a simple, natural, homely and most happily tempered mind. Born of an excellent father who, though indifferently educated, had entered with a veritable enthusiasm into the movement of the Renaissance and all the *liberal* innovations of his day, Montaigne had corrected in himself, by virtue of great shrewdness and accuracy of thought, this excess of enthusiasm, vivacity and tenderness; without however renouncing the original stock. It is hardly more than thirty years since it was usual to speak of the sixteenth century as a *barbarous* epoch, exception being made in favour of Montaigne alone: this view showed error and ignorance. The sixteenth century was a great century, fruitful, powerful, very learned, already very refined in parts, although very rude and violent and apparently still gross from many points of view. What it lacked above all was taste, if we understand by taste a clean and perfect choice, an analysis of the elements of the beautiful. But this taste, in the following ages, too soon became distaste. However, if in literature it is crude, in the Arts properly so called, those of the hand and the chisel, even in France the sixteenth century is much superior by reason of the quality of its taste to the two following: it is neither thin nor massive, neither heavy nor forced. In Art it has a rich and delicate taste, free and complex at the same time, both antique and modern, quite individual and original. In the moral order it is still unequal and very mixed. It is the century of contrasts, and of contrasts in all their ruggedness, a century of philosophy already and of fanaticism, of scepticism and strong faith. All these strike and collide together; there is as yet no blending and shading of colours. All is in a ferment, in chaos; every ray of sun raises a storm. It is not a serene century, nor what we might call a century of lights, it is an age of struggle and combats. The great singularity of Montaigne, and what makes him a *phenomenon*, is that in this century

as we have described it, he was moderation, circumspection and temperance itself.

Born on the last day of February 1533, fed from his earliest childhood and in play on the ancient languages, awakened even from the cradle to the sound of musical instruments, he seemed to have been brought up not to live in a rude and violent epoch, but rather for the *Cabinet of the Muses*, and intercourse with them. His rare good sense corrected the perhaps rather too ideal and too poetic elements in this early education; it left him only that happy habit of doing and saying everything with freshness and cheerfulness. Married after thirty to an estimable woman who was his companion for twenty-eight years, his only passion appears to have been that of friendship. He has immortalised his own friendship for Étienne de La Boétie, whom he lost after four years of the sweetest and closest intimacy. After having been for a time a Councillor in the Parliament of Bordeaux, Montaigne retired before he was forty from the stir of public affairs and ambition to live at home, in his tower at Montaigne, in the enjoyment of himself and his mind, indulging his observation, his thoughts and that busy idleness, which we know even in its slightest diversions and fancies. The first edition of the *Essays* appeared in 1580, comprising two Books only, and in a shape which represents only a first outline of what we have in the following editions. In this same year Montaigne started on a journey through Switzerland and Italy. It was during these travels that *Messieurs* of Bordeaux elected him Mayor of their town. He at first excused himself and declined, but soon, better advised, and by command of the King, he accepted this charge 'the finer, he says, in having no wage and no profit attached to it, other than the honour of its execution.' He exercised it for four years, from July 1582 to July 1586, having been re-elected after the first period of two years. Montaigne then, at the age of fifty, re-entered public life a little in spite of himself, and on the eve of civil disturbances which, lulled and slumbering for a time, were soon to begin again, more terrible than ever, at the cry of the League. Though lessons in general are of no avail, though the art of wisdom and above all that of happiness are not to be taught, let us not refuse however the pleasure of listening to Mon-

taigne, let us indulge ourselves at least with the sight of this wisdom and this happiness in him ; let him speak of public matters, of revolutions and disturbances, and of his manner of behaving under them. Once more, it is not a model that we are setting up before ourselves, it is a distraction we wish to enjoy and offer to our readers.

And in the first place, although he lived in a stormy and agitated century, a century which one who went through the Reign of Terror (M. Daunou) was capable of calling the *most tragic century of all history*, Montaigne was far from believing that he was born in the worst of epochs. He is not like those pre-occupied and imaginative people who, measuring everything by their visual horizon, judging everything by their present sensation, always think the malady they are suffering from to be the most serious that human nature ever experienced. He is like Socrates, who regarded himself as a citizen, not of a single city, but of the whole world ; with a full and wide imagination he embraces the universality of countries and ages ; he judges more equitably even the ills of which he is the witness and the victim : ' who is it that seeing these Civil Wars of ours, he remarks, does not cry out that this machine is upsetting, and that the Day of Judgment is seizing us by the neck ? without remembering that many worse things have been seen, and that meanwhile ten thousand other parts of the world are living merrily and having a good time notwithstanding : for my part, considering the licence and impunity that always attend such commotions, I wonder to see them so moderate. To him that feels the hail-stones patter about his ears, the whole hemisphere appears to be in storm and tempest.' And raising his thoughts and heart higher and higher, reducing his own suffering to its right proportions in the vast bosom of nature, regarding not only himself but entire kingdoms as a simple point in the Infinite, he adds in words which anticipate Pascal, and which the latter did not disdain to borrow in outline : ' But whosoever shall represent to his fancy, as in a picture, that great image of our mother Nature in her full majesty ; whoever shall read in her face so general and so constant a variety ; whoever shall observe himself in that figure, and not himself, but a whole kingdom, no bigger than the least touch of a pencil, that man alone is able to value things according to

their true estimate and grandeur.' (Book I, chap. xxv.)

Thus Montaigne already gives us a lesson, a needless lesson, which I will derive however, since, among all the needless things that are written, this is perhaps as good as another. I do not presume to attenuate the gravity of the circumstances in which our country is involved at present, and I think that we have need, indeed, to combine all our energy, all our wisdom and courage, to help each other and to help our country to triumph over them with honour to herself. However, let us condescend to reflect and say to ourselves that, leaving the Empire out of consideration, which was an epoch of internal calm, and, before 1812, of prosperity, we, who are complaining so loudly, have lived peaceably from 1815 to 1830, fifteen long years; that the Three Days of July only inaugurated a different order of things which, for eighteen years more, was a guarantee of peace and industrial prosperity; in all thirty-two years of calm. Stormy days have come, have burst over us, and will no doubt do so again. Let us know how to live through them, but let us not exclaim every day, as we are disposed to do, that never have such storms been seen as we are experiencing at present. In order to withdraw our minds from the present emotion, to regain a little lucidity and moderation in our judgments, let us every evening read over again a page of Montaigne.

I have been struck by one opinion of Montaigne, insofar as it concerns the men of his time, and may apply equally well to those of ours. Our philosopher says in one place (Book II, chap. xvii) that he knows of enough men who have each some very fine parts: one has wit; another has courage; another, address; this one has conscience, that other, knowledge, more than one have language; in short each has his part: 'But a man generally great, and that has all these brave parts together, or any one of them in such a degree of excellence, that we should admire him, or compare him with those we honour of times past, my fortune never brought me acquainted with. . . ." He proceeds to make an exception in favour of his friend Etienne de La Boétie, but he was one of those great men who died *in the blade* and in promise, before having had time to yield fruit. This judgment of Montaigne made me smile. He saw no real and complete great man in his time, which was however the time of



L'Hôpital, of Coligny and the Guises. Well! what do you say of our own time, which has so many men who are evidently distinguished, as in Montaigne's day, one for his wit, another for his courage, a third for his address, some (but they are more rare) for their conscience, a number for their knowledge or their language? but the complete man is wanting, and is very much to be desired. One of the most intellectual witnesses of our own day has acknowledged this and already announced it a few years ago: 'Our time, M. de Rémusat has said, lacks great men<sup>1</sup>.'

How did Montaigne carry out his functions as Chief Magistrate of a great city? If we took him at his own word and judged by first impressions, we might think that he acquitted himself rather languidly and without much spirit. Did not Horace speak disparagingly of himself and say that one day in war he dropped his shield (*relicta non bene parmula*)? Let us not be too hasty in taking these men of taste at their word, who have a horror of over-rating themselves. In the matter of vigilance and activity, these refined and acute minds are prone to keep more than their promise. Many a man I know of, who vaunts himself so loudly, is, I am almost certain, less brave in the fight than Horace, and less vigilant in council than Montaigne.

On entering upon his charge, Montaigne is very careful to warn *Messieurs* of Bordeaux not to expect too much of him: he discloses himself without any affectation: 'I portrayed myself faithfully and conscientiously, he says, such as I feel myself to be; without memory, without vigilance, without experience and without vigour; without hatred too, without ambition, without avarice and without violence.' He would be very sorry, whilst taking in hand the affairs of the city, to take them as much to heart as he formerly saw his worthy father do, who in the end sacrificed to them both his peace of mind and his health. *Such an austere and ardent pledge of an impetuous desire* is not in his nature. He is of opinion 'that we should lend ourselves to others, and give ourselves to our own affairs.' And reclothing his thought, according to his wont, in all sorts of familiar

<sup>1</sup> *Essais de Philosophie*, vol. I, p. 22.

and picturesque shapes and images, he continues that, if he sometimes allows himself to be persuaded to take affairs in hand which are strange to him, he promises 'to take them in hand, but not to his lungs and his liver.' So we are well fore-warned, and must await results. Monsieur the Mayor and Montaigne will always be two distinct persons; in his office and in the part he is playing he reserves to himself a certain freedom and secret security. He will continue to judge things in his own way and with impartiality, even while acting loyally in the cause which is entrusted to him. He will be far from approving or even excusing all that he sees his own party do, and so also in the case of an adversary he will be capable of discernment, and say: 'He does this wickedly, and that virtuously.'—'I desire, he adds, that the advantage be on our side, but I am not beside myself with anger, if it is not. I side firmly with the soundest of the parties, but I do not affect to make myself especially conspicuous as the enemy of the others.' And he enters into several details and applications which were for the timepiquant. We may observe however, in order to explain in our turn and justify this rather wide profession of impartiality, that the leaders of the parties then face to face, the three Henrys, were men of renown and eminence on several grounds: Henri, Duke of Guise, chief of the League; Henri, King of Navarre, chief of the opposition; and King Henri III, in whose name Montaigne was Mayor, and who oscillated between the two. When the parties have neither head nor leader, when they show themselves in the body only, that is, in their most hideous and brutal reality, it is more difficult, and also more hazardous, to show them so much fairness, and to do proper justice to each, whilst the action is going on.

The principle which guided Montaigne in his whole administration was to look to facts, to results, and to make no allowance for show and glitter: 'According as a good effect is more showy, he thought, I discount its goodness.' For it is always to be feared that it has been produced for its showiness rather than for its goodness: '*Displayed is half sold.*' As for him, that was not his way, he displayed nothing; he managed as quietly as he was able the minds of men and public affairs; he employed for the good of all that gift of conciliation and

quickness of comprehension, that personal attraction with which nature had endowed him, and which is of so happy and general an influence in the handling of men. He preferred anticipating the mischief to the honour which was to be gained in suppressing it: 'Does any man desire to be ill, he says cheerfully, for the sake of seeing his physician at work? And would that physician not deserve to be scourged, who desired the plague in order to practise his art?' Far then from desiring that the troubles and maladies of the City's affairs might help to raise him to honour in his government, he *cordially*, he says, *lent his shoulder to relieving and lightening them*. He is not one of those who are rendered giddy or intoxicated by municipal honours, those *ward dignities*, as he calls them, the fame of which *reaches only from one street-corner to another*; if he were a man to catch at glory, he would see it in something greater, and would place it higher. I know not however whether he would have changed his method and procedure, even on a vaster stage. To further the public good, quietly and by imperceptible degrees, would still have appeared to him the ideal of ability and the crown of happiness. 'He who would refuse me the credit, he says, for the order, the *soft and silent tranquillity* which accompanied my conduct, cannot at least deprive me of the share which belongs to me on the score of my good fortune.' And he is inexhaustible in the light and animated expressions with which he describes the kind of effectual and inconspicuous services which he thinks he has rendered, much superior to the acts of men more noisy and vain-glorious than himself: 'Those actions have much more grace, *which escape from the hand of the doer noiselessly and nonchalantly*, and which some honest man afterwards chooses and rescues from the shade to push them into the light for their own sake.' Thus fortune served Montaigne as much as he could have wished, and even in his management of public affairs, in difficult conjunctures, he had no occasion to belie his maxim and his motto, nor to depart too much from the course of life he had traced out for himself: 'For myself, *I commend a gliding, sombre and silent life*.' He reached the term of his office, almost satisfied with himself, having done what he had promised himself, and much more than he had promised others.

The letter recently discovered by M. Horace de Viel-Castel comes very opportunely to corroborate this chapter, in which Montaigne discloses and judges himself during the period of his public life. 'This letter (says M. Payen), is all business. Montaigne is Mayor; Bordeaux, recently disturbed, seems to be preparing for fresh troubles; the King's Lieutenant is absent. It is Wednesday the 22 May 1585; it is night-time, Montaigne is sitting up late, and writing to the Governor of the province.' This letter, which is of too particular and local an interest to be inserted here, may be summed up in these words: Montaigne regrets the absence of the Maréchal de Matignon and fears it will be prolonged; he keeps and will continue to keep him informed of all, and entreats him to return as soon as affairs will permit: 'We are after our gates and guards, and attending a little more closely to them in your absence. . . . If any new and important occasion supervenes, I will immediately despatch an express messenger, and you must consider that nothing will budge unless you hear from me.' He entreats M. de Matignon however to remember, that he might not have time to acquaint him, 'praying you to consider that that kind of movements is apt to be so unexpected that, if they should occur, they will have me by the throat without crying *Look out!*' For the rest, he will do all to anticipate any likely events: 'I shall do all in my power to *feel* for news on all sides, and, to this end, I will visit and see the tastes of all sorts of men.' In fine, after informing the Maréchal of all the slightest town rumours, he urges him to return, assuring him 'that we will meanwhile spare neither our anxiety nor, if need be, our life, to preserve all things in the King's obedience.' Montaigne was not lavish of protestations and phrases, and what in others would have been a mere form of speech, was in his case a real pledge and truth.

However things became worse and worse; the Civil War breaks out; parties, friendly or hostile (there is no great difference) infest the country. Montaigne, who returns to his country manor as often as he is able, and when the affairs of his office, which is drawing to a close, do not command his presence in Bordeaux, is exposed to all sorts of insults and outrages:

'I incurred, he says, the inconveniences which moder-

ation brings along with it in such maladies ; I was curried on all hands. To the Ghibelines I was a Guelph, to the Guelphs a Ghibeline.' In the midst of these personal grievances, he is able to detach and elevate his thoughts sufficiently to reflect above all on the public misfortunes and the degradation of characters. Having a near view of party dissensions, and of the abject and contemptible qualities which they are so quick to lay bare, he blushes to see party-leaders of some renown degrading themselves and stooping to base complaisance : for, in these circumstances, we know as well as he, 'it is for the commander to follow the soldiers, to pay court to them, and consult their humours ; *he alone has to obey* ; all the rest are free and dissolute.'— It pleases me, he says ironically, to see how much cowardice and pusillanimity there is in ambition ; by how abject and servile ways it must arrive at its end.' Despising ambition as he does, he is not sorry to see it thus dropping the mask in these practices and degrading itself in his eyes. However, his goodness of heart again getting the better of his pride and his contempt, he adds mournfully : 'But this displeases me, to see good and generous natures, and that are capable of justice, every day corrupted in the management and command of this confusion. . . We had enough of ill-born souls, without spoiling those that were good and generous.' For his part, he seeks in this misfortune an occasion and a motive to acquire new strength and vigour. Hit by a thousand offences and a thousand ills which come *in single file*, and which he could have suffered more boldly *in a crowd*, that is, all at the same time ; driven by war, by contagion and all the scourges (July 1585), he already asks himself, as things are going, to whom he will have recourse, he and his, of whom he will demand a refuge and subsistence in his old age ; and after searching well and looking all around, he finds in the end that he is all naked and *in his doublet*. For, 'dropping plumb and from so great a height, it ought to be into the arms of a solid, vigorous and fortunate affection : and they are rare, even if there be any.' We may see from the way in which he speaks, that La Boétie has long been no more. Montaigne then feels that in his distress he must after all rely and build upon none but himself, and that now or never is the time to put in practice those lofty precepts, which

he has spent his days gathering here and there from the books of philosophers ; he acquires new life, he summons up all his virtue : ' In an ordinary and tranquil time a man prepares himself for moderate and common accidents ; but in this confusion, wherein we have been *for these thirty years*, every Frenchman, whether in particular or in general, sees himself every hour upon the point of the total ruin and overthrow of his fortune.' And, far from being dejected and cursing his lot in having been born in so tempestuous an age, he suddenly congratulates himself on this circumstance : ' Let us be thankful to fate for having thrown us into a century that is not soft, languid and idle.' Since the curiosity of sages leads them to search in the past for the confusions of States, in order to study there the secrets of history and, as we should say, the physiology of the social body in its nakedness : ' So does my curiosity, he declares, make me somewhat pleased to see with my own eyes this notable spectacle of our public death, its forms and symptoms ; and, seeing that I cannot hinder it, I am content to be destined to witness it and thereby instruct myself.' I will not presume to propose this kind of comfort to many people ; the majority of men have not this heroic and inveterate curiosity, such as Empedocles and Pliny the Elder had, those two men of intrepid curiosity, who went straight to the volcanoes and subversions of nature, to examine them more closely, at the risk of being engulfed and perishing. To Montaigne however, constituted as we know him to have been, this thought, prompted by a stoical observation, did not fail to bring some comfort even in his real ills. Considering that state of mock peace and precarious truce, that reign of deep and secret corruption, which had preceded the recent disturbances, he almost congratulated himself also on seeing the end of it ; for ' it was, he says on the government of Henri III, a universal junction of particular members, rotten in emulation of one another, and the most of them with inveterate ulcers, that neither required nor admitted of any cure. This crumbling therefore did rather animate than oppress me. . . . ' Note that his health, usually more delicate, was now restored to the level of his moral state, and it was strong enough to withstand these different shocks, which seemed likely to impair it. He had the satisfaction of

feeling that he was able to hold up against fortune, and that it required a greater shock than that to *throw him out of the saddle*.

Another, a more humble and humane consideration, sustains him in these ills, namely the consolation which is born of a common misfortune, of a misfortune shared by all, and of the sight of others' courage. The people especially, the true people, those who are victims and not spoilers, the peasants of his neighbourhood, excite his sympathy by the manner in which they bear the same ills as he and worse. That contagion or plague which was then raging through the country, struck especially among these poor people; from them Montaigne learns resignation and the practice of philosophy. 'Let us look down to the earth, upon the poor people that we see scattered about, their heads bent over their labour, that neither know Aristotle nor Cato, example nor precept: even from these does nature every day extract effects of constancy and patience, more pure and firm than those we study so curiously in the schools.' And he goes on to show how they labour to the bitter end, even in their grief and sickness, till the moment when their strength fails them: 'He that is digging my garden has this morning buried his father or his son . . . they never keep their beds but to die.' All this chapter is beautiful, touching, appropriate, breathing both a noble Stoic elevation of mind, and that debonair and homely nature of which Montaigne rightly said that he was issued and formed. This chapter could only be bettered by a chapter which might be headed *Consolation in Public Calamities*, of some other not more human, but truly divine book, a book in which the hand of God should be everywhere visible, not perfunctorily as with Montaigne, but really present and living. In a word, the consolation that Montaigne gives to himself and others, as as lofty and beautiful as any human consolation can be without prayer.

He wrote this chapter (Book III, chap. xii) in the very midst of the public ills he describes, and before they were ended: he terminated it in his light and poetic manner, holding it up as an assemblage of examples, *a heap of foreign flowers*, for which he himself provided only the *string to tie them together*.

That is Montaigne all over, and whatever serious things

he may be saying, he crowns them with a charm. To judge of his manner it is enough to open his book at any page indifferently, and to listen to him discoursing on any subject whatsoever; there is no theme but he enlivens it and makes it bear fruit. In the chapter *Of Liars*, for example, after expatiating at the beginning on his lack of memory, and deriving the various reasons he has for consolation in this defect, he suddenly adds this fresh and delightful reason: 'On the other hand (thanks to this power of forgetting), the places I revisit and the books I read over again always smile upon me with a fresh novelty.' Thus, on every topic he touches upon, he is continually beginning again, and opening up springs of freshness.

Montesquieu once wrote, in memorable words: 'The four great poets, Plato, Malebranche, Shaftesbury, Montaigne!' How true this is of Montaigne! No writer in French, not excluding the poets properly so-called, has had so exalted an idea of poetry as he. 'Poetry, he said, has ever had that power over me, from a child, to transpire and transport me.' He was penetrated with the feeling that 'we have many more poets than judges and interpreters of poetry, and that it is easier to compose it than to understand it.' In itself and its pure beauty it escapes definition; and he who tries to discern it with his eyes and to consider it in its true essence, can see it no more than he can see the *splendour of a flash of lightning*. In the habitual continuity of his style Montaigne is of all writers the richest in life-like and bold similes, the most naturally fertile in metaphors, which with him are never separated from the thought, but seize it by the middle, from within, join and clasp it. In this respect, whilst obeying so fully his own genius, he has overtaken and sometimes exceeded the genius of the language. This brief, virile style, every stroke of which hits the mark, driving in the sense and reiterating it, this style of which it may be said that it is a continual epigram, or an ever-renewed metaphor, has only once been successfully wielded in French, and that by Montaigne alone. If one tried to imitate him, even supposing that that were possible, and that one were fitted for it by nature, if one tried to write with that rigour, that exact correspondence, and that varied continuity of figures and touches, it would be necessary every moment to force one's language



to a higher poetic power and completeness than is to be found in the speech of ordinary use. This style *à la Montaigne*, so consistent and so varied in the succession and the choice of its images, requires that the tissue itself should be partially created at the same time, in order to bear them. It is absolutely necessary that the woof should be extended and lengthened in places, in order to sew the metaphor upon it; but here am I almost carried away to adopt his style in order to define him. Our good language, indeed, our prose, which always has more or less of a conversational tone, has not naturally sufficient resources and a sufficient stock of canvas for a continuous picture; it runs and flees rapidly, and escapes from us: side by side with a living image it will show a sudden gap and a deficiency. If we tried to make up for it by audacity and invention, as Montaigne does, by creating, by imagining the expression, the missing phrase, we should soon appear strained and far-fetching. This style *à la Montaigne* would be, in many respects, at open warfare with Voltaire's. It could only have been born to flourish in that full freedom of the sixteenth century, in a mind frank and ingenious, bold and refined, brave and delicate, unique in temper, appearing free and rather licentious, even at that time, and drawing inspiration and boldness from the pure and direct spirit of antique sources, without being intoxicated by them.

Such as he is, Montaigne is our Horace; he is so in substance, often in form and expression, though in the latter he often also reaches up to Seneca. His book is a treasure-house of moral observations and experience; at whatever page we open it, and in whatever disposition of mind, we are sure to find there some wise thought expressed in a living and durable manner, which at once stands out and engraves itself on the mind, a beautiful meaning in full and striking words, in a single line, strong, familiar or great. His whole book, says Étienne Pasquier, is a veritable *seminary* of fine and notable maxims; and they penetrate the better because they hasten and press on each other's heels, without any parade; there are some for every age and every hour of life; we cannot read it for any time without our whole mind being filled and lined as it were, or, to express myself better, all armed and clothed with it. We have just seen that he has many a

useful counsel and direct word of comfort for the use of the honest man born for private life and involved in times of disturbance and revolution. To which I will yet add one of those pieces of advice he addresses to those who, like myself and many men of my acquaintance, undergo public torments without ever having provoked them, and without thinking ourselves strong enough to avert them. Montaigne counsels them, as Horace would have done, to be prepared for the worst long beforehand, but without being too anxious to take complete advantage, in a liberal and sound spirit, of any favourable moments and lucid intervals; on this point he makes just and piquant comparisons in rapid succession, ending with this one, which appears to me the prettiest, and which besides is quite seasonable and suitable to the occasion: it is a folly and a fever, he says, to '*put on your furred gown at Midsummer, because you will stand in need of it at Christmas.*'

## MIRABEAU AND LA MARCK <sup>1</sup>

*Monday, May 5, 1851.*

WHEN speaking of Mirabeau a few weeks ago, I announced that a publication was in course of preparation which was expected to throw the strongest light upon the historical and definitive Mirabeau and the part he played during the Revolution. This work has now appeared, and every reader will be able to appreciate its interest and importance.

In 1788, Mirabeau, already celebrated, and among the most prominent as a political writer, made the acquaintance of the Count of La Marck, a Belgian *grand seigneur* in the service of France. M. de La Marck, a younger son of the Duke of Arenberg, had entered French service at the age of seventeen, and at twenty (1773) was proprietary Colonel of a regiment of German infantry which his maternal grandfather had left him. Young, active, endowed with a clear and shrewd judgment, related to the noblest families in the Austrian Netherlands and at the Court of Vienna, he was from the first on a very good footing at the Court of Versailles, and most favourably situated for making observations and enjoying himself; he belonged particularly to the society which formed itself around the Dauphiness, presently Queen, Marie-Antoinette. As a soldier he exhibited some talent and distinguished himself in the war in India. On his return he fought a duel which made some stir. In short, the Count of La Marck lacked none of the qualifications which at that time went to form a man of the highest society, living in the most agreeable circumstances and enjoying a flattering consideration. In 1788, when ideas were turning more and more in the direction of seriousness, he

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence between Mirabeau and the Count of La Marck (1789-1791), collected, arranged and published by M. Ad. de Bacourt, ex-Ambassador.

was curious to know Mirabeau, and was invited to dine with him and a few other guests, men of the Court, by the Prince de Poix, at Versailles. It was Senac de Meilhan who arranged the dinner and introduced the *lion* :

'When he saw Mirabeau enter (says M. de Bacourt speaking from accurate observations), M. de La Marck was struck by his exterior. In stature he was tall, square-built, thick-set. His head in itself was large, much above the ordinary proportions, and appeared still larger through an enormous mass of curled and powdered hair. He wore a walking coat with buttons of coloured stones and of inordinate size, and his shoe-buckles were likewise very large. In short his whole dress exhibited an exaggeration of the fashions of the day which harmonised little with the good taste of the men of the Court. His face was disfigured by small-pox. He had a furtive look, but his eyes were full of fire. Wishing to be polite, he exaggerated his bows ; his first words were affected and rather vulgar compliments. In a word, he had neither the appearance nor the language of the company in which he was ; and although he was by birth on a level with his hosts, one immediately saw by his manners that he lacked the ease which is acquired by familiarity with the great world.'

I will make only a few remarks on this first effect which Mirabeau produced on the guests, and which has been so graphically rendered ; I will take the liberty to explain and comment upon only two or three touches, as well as upon the expression *ridiculous* which appears a few lines further down, and is applied to Mirabeau's exterior : 'After dinner, continues the narrator, M. de Meilhan having brought round the conversation to politics and administration, everything that had struck the witnesses at first as ridiculous in Mirabeau's exterior immediately disappeared : nothing more was remarked but the abundant flow and the justice of his ideas.' Let us not forget that we are under the roof of the Prince de Poix, that is to say at the point of view of Versailles and that exquisite, elegant world, where simplicity had attained the last degree of good taste and refined study. But all this was only made to be seen and appreciated at very close quarters. With Mirabeau, on the other hand, everything is outside the ordinary proportions ; his whole personality is cut after a different pattern. He has the mask of the orator and the great tribunitian actor : that mask is not, any more than that of the ancient actor, made to be seen any

nearer than from the amphitheatre. The magnificent statue requires to be placed at its proper perspective, in order that no part of it may appear too big and exaggerated. So again, with regard to fashions, Mirabeau refrained, from instinct rather than calculation, from adopting those of the day, so flimsy, so spare, so skimpy. As his father, who judged him very correctly this time, expressed himself, he had 'noble manners and an ostentation in dress in an age of shred-like (*dépenaillée*) fashion.' In the Versailles world he might appear at first sight not to possess familiarity with the great world; but in the world of Paris and of all those who did not belong to the Court and the select circles, he appeared in his dress, in his gestures and his manners, and even in his familiarities, a *grand seigneur* of the olden times who dressed luxuriously and capriciously. Judging men inwardly so well as he did, he knew that the majority of people form their ideas of others only by their outside and their *around* (the expression is his). He knew besides that the people like something *glossy*. Thus, naturally, instinctively, and as if by calculation, his whole personality was clothed and invested as it were with a certain magnificence which, at first sight, and in a drawing-room where good taste bids us suppress and tone down all things, appeared a little loud and sensational. But at this dinner, when the first impression had died away, he was charming, fascinating, treating the widest subjects with a brilliant energy; and, on the matter of Germany in particular, to which M. de La Marck brought him, he spoke still better than he had written. At this dinner M. de La Marck had one merit: he at once felt a strong attraction to Mirabeau, an attraction that was not fugitive and prompted by mere curiosity, but a real attraction which was to end in the firmest and most serious friendship.

But it did not begin in this same year. After a few visits which followed the dinner at Versailles, they lost sight of one another for some time, and only met again at the States General. M. de La Marck, though a foreigner by birth, was qualified for election to the States General, by reason of a few fiefs that he possessed in the kingdom. As a member of the Order of the nobility, and thinking it his duty to follow the first steps of the body to which he belonged, he did not meet Mirabeau at the Assembly until after the junction of the three Orders. It was Mirabeau

who made the first advance, saying : ' Do you not know your old friends ? You have not yet spoken a word to me.' They renewed acquaintance in a few words : ' With an aristocrat like you, added Mirabeau, I shall always easily agree.' The first time they dined together in tête-à-tête Mirabeau began by saying : ' You are very discontented with me, is it not so ?'—' With you and with many others.'—' If that is the case, you ought to begin with those who inhabit the Château. The ship of state is being struck by the most violent tempest, and there is nobody at the helm.'

Those words : *there is nobody at the helm*, sufficiently expressed Mirabeau's meaning. M. Necker was steering at the time, and Mirabeau certainly did not regard him as a pilot. He unfolded his ideas on the situation to M. de La Marck, and his general views with regard to a possible directorship :

' The lot of France is decided, exclaimed Mirabeau ; the words *liberty, taxes by the consent of the people*, have resounded through the whole kingdom. The result of it all will be a government something like that of England.'—

' In spite of all his declamation and the contempt which he poured upon the ministers, he showed that he was a monarchist, and said several times that it would not be his fault if they rejected him and forced him, for his personal security, to become the head of the popular party : " The time has come, he said, when men must be esteemed by what they carry in this little space, *here, under the brow, between the two eyebrows*."'

This took place at the end of June 1789. A month before, during the last days of May, Mirabeau had made an overture of the kind to M. Malouet : ' I desired, he said, to have an explanation with you, for notwithstanding your moderation I regard you as a friend of liberty, and I am perhaps more frightened than you by the ferment which I see going on in the minds of the people and the disasters which might result from it. I am not the man to make a base surrender to despotism. I desire a free, but monarchical, constitution. I do not desire to shake the foundations of the monarchy. . . . You are intimate with MM. Necker and de Montmorin, you must know what are their intentions and whether they have a plan ; if that plan is reasonable, I will defend it.' M. Malouet communicated this conversation to MM. Necker and Mont-

morin ; but he found them so narrow-minded and so timid, so distrustful and so loath to treat with Mirabeau, that he thought it useless to insist, and matters remained as before in that direction. After his first brilliant successes in the speaker's tribune, Mirabeau returned to the charge with M. de La Marck. In acting thus, he was sincere and quite in harmony with his real political ideas. Six months previously, as he was leaving for the Provence for his election, his father, the Marquis, wrote to the Bailli (22 January 1789) : ' He says openly that he will not suffer France to be *demonarchised*, and at the same time he is the friend of the coryphei of the Tiers.' Mirabeau's double political thought, even before the opening of the States General, was entirely comprised in these two conditions, *tiers-état* and monarchy, and we may say that he never ceased to combine and uphold the two ideas from the first day of his legislative life till his death, allowing however for all the checks, the intermissions and frequent errors in his progress and conduct, the results of impetuous humours, of his orator's and tribune's instincts, his tactical necessities and his personal irritations. But these errors and, to call them by their right name, these escapades, by which he sometimes baffles and breaks his general line of conduct, are greatly reduced now that we have the key to everything, and can follow him almost day by day during this last period, both on the stage and behind the scenes.

After a few more explicit words from Mirabeau, at the end of a dinner during which he had expressed himself with moderation : ' Why do you not make them understand at Court that I am more disposed in their favour than against them ? ' M. de La Marck decided to make some definite overtures. But he did not make them without first convincing himself that the suspicion of *venality*, which was pretty generally diffused with regard to Mirabeau, was without foundation. Not but that, in his life of want after his release from Vincennes until his entry into the States General, Mirabeau, to provide his needs of all kinds, intellectual and others, often had recourse to shifts which we would rather that fortune had made unnecessary ; but, on many a notable occasion, he, a man of power and labour, who lacked everything, who could not do without many books and documents, who was

naturally (as his father used to say) *of great and strong life*, often hard up for a few francs and reduced to pawn even his dress clothes and his lace, he had resisted the temptation of writing anything that was not in his line and his political scheme, regarded at least as a whole. M. de La Marck, after making sure of the reality of the situation, and particularly that Mirabeau was not, as his enemies accused him of being, mixed up with the Orleans party, finding that he was only a man of the highest talent and the foremost capacity hindered by *subaltern embarrassments*, resolved to assist him to extricate himself from them and to regain dignity, liberty of action, independence: this point having been won, the rest would infallibly follow. He began by giving him direct aid with the delicacy of a friend. Then he approached one of the members of the Ministry, M. de Cicé, Archbishop of Bordeaux, the Keeper of the Seals, to try whether Mirabeau's good will could not be turned to account for the good of all. But there was nothing to be hoped for from that quarter as long as M. Necker was master. 'Yet, said Mirabeau to M. de La Marck, what position can I possibly take? The Government rejects me and I can only join the opposition, which is revolutionary, or risk losing my popularity, which is my strength. The armies are face to face; they must either negotiate or fight; the Government, who are doing neither the one nor the other, are playing a very dangerous game.

Some time after that, M. de La Marck found occasion to inform the Queen through a third person about his relations with Mirabeau, which were already intimate and the subject of remarks; he discreetly hinted what were his hopes in maintaining these relations, and that such a man might be perhaps turned to good account, in the interests even of the monarchy. A few days afterwards the Queen herself replied to M. de La Marck: 'I have never doubted your sentiments, and, when I heard that you were intimate with Mirabeau, I was sure that your intentions were good; but you will never be able to do anything with him; and, with regard to what you think the King's Ministers ought to do, I do not agree with you. We shall never be so unfortunate, I think, as to be reduced to the painful extremity of turning to Mirabeau.'

These obstacles which Mirabeau met with on all hands



against finding a wholesome and regular employment of all his powers caused him great pain ; he deeply felt his lack of moral authority, in spite of his celebrity and genius : ' Ah ! how the immorality of my youth prejudices the public weal ! ' he would often say. He then threw himself in the direction which was most open and easiest to him, into those broad paths of the eloquent and popular orator, to which everything called him. He rushed into them with all the impetuosity and the whole torrent of his speech, hurling the thunder and gathering applause. Then, suddenly, his statesman's perspicacity would hold him back and warn him that he himself was driving to the edge of the abyss ; and coming down from the stage and his rôle . ' But what are these people thinking of ? ' he would say, speaking of the Court (September 1789) ; do they not see the precipice that is opening under their feet ? '

' Once even, driven to a more violent state of exasperation than usual, he exclaimed : " All is lost ; the King and the Queen will perish, and you shall see : *the populace will beat their corpses* "—He observed, adds M. de La Marck, the horror which these expressions caused me. " Yes, yes, he repeated, they will beat their corpses ; you are not sufficiently alive to the dangers of their position ; we ought to let them know of it however. " '

After the events of the 5 and 6 October which brought the King and Queen prisoners to Paris, in which events, in spite of odious calumnies, he took no other share than that of indignantly deploring them, Mirabeau, feeling that the monarchy thus degraded would need to raise itself up again by some great deed, drew up a Memorandum which may be read under the date of the 15 October 1789. This Memorandum offered a complete plan of conduct, bold, monarchical, and by no means counter-revolutionary. For, let us not forget it, Mirabeau's constant object, in his Notes and his correspondence with the Court, at whatever date they were written, and however much they may vary in tone, his fixed aim is to reconcile *national liberty* and the *monarchy*, to seek to form a *coalition between the executive power and the legislative power*, without which an empire like that of France cannot endure. It is not a republican royalty after La Fayette's pattern that he desires ; we see him, on the contrary, trying to cut out of the Constitution the republican ideas which penetrate

into it under La Fayette's influence and which threaten to make it a code of anarchy, of civil dissensions and conflicts between the authorities. Mirabeau wishes to combine the principles of representative government with those of a regenerated monarchical government; he desires full independence of the executive power within its own sphere. His starting-point is always the Revolution, which he considers as irrevocable in its great destructive results; and this clean slate of civil equality, this vast levelling which extends over the ruin of the privileged bodies, seems to him, if rightly used, as favourable at least to the royalty as to the people. He shows himself desirous besides of diminishing, on every occasion, the influence of Paris and its predominance over the provinces. He knows that great centre and hearth of corruption, and he early despairs of it. 'Instead of trying to change the temperature of Paris, which can never be done, we should on the contrary make use of it to detach the provinces from the capital.' He constantly aspires, in his various projects, to free both the royalty and the provinces from this factitious and inflammatory Parisian influence. These sound but bold ideas of Mirabeau had difficulty in penetrating to the right quarter. The Memorandum of the 15 October was handed by the Count of La Marck to Monsieur (afterwards Louis XVIII), in the hope that he would speak of it to the Queen: 'You are mistaken, said Monsieur to the Count of La Marck, if you believe that it is in the Queen's power to determine the King in so serious a question.' And emphasising the King's weakness and indecision, which was beyond all expression, he continued: 'To give you an idea of his character, *imagine that you had some oiled wory balls, and that you were trying in vain to keep them together.*'

It was then that Mirabeau sincerely tried to approach La Fayette, who, since the October days and as the result of the King's presence in Paris, was the real dictator. Enjoying an immense popularity at the time, he was supposed by the King and those about him to be protecting him against the seditions of the people, and by the people to be the defender of liberty against the plottings of the Court. If, in considering the relations between Mirabeau and La Fayette, we here leave out of account everything that is of a secondary and too personal a nature and a few

bad words, if we consider them only in their entirety and their aim, and in their true spirit, we find it impossible, and we think that every impartial reader will find it impossible, not to arrive at a result that is most unfavourable to the illustrious general and to his definitive historical renown. It was Mirabeau's aim to convince La Fayette that the danger was great, that it was no longer desirable to keep royalty in leash, to continually and systematically demean it in public opinion, to keep it under strict watch and in confinement, with a limited and incompetent ministry; that M. Necker was used up, that his foresight was short-dated and had always been confined to the revolution of each month; that he had no glance into the future; that their only hope lay in a truly capable and active Ministry, in a Ministry of *prime force*; and then, with that self-consciousness in which he was justified, treading all false modesty under foot, Mirabeau offered himself frankly and cordially. He held out his hand to La Fayette and said: 'Here I am! let us unite.' He said it again even after the decree of the Assembly which forbade its members becoming Ministers. He desired to be only an adviser, but an adviser who was heeded. One should hear this incomparable appeal:

'What I still have to say to you, wrote Mirabeau to La Fayette, on the 1 June 1790, would be embarrassing if I were, like so many others, inflated with human respect, that weed of all virtue; for what I think and wish to declare to you, is that I am better than all those people, and that, though perhaps blind in one eye, I am the one-eyed man in the kingdom of the blind, and more necessary to you than all your united Committees. Not but that Committees are necessary, but to direct, and not to consult; but to spread, to propagate, to disperse, and not to transform into Privy Councils; as if the result of the deliberation of many were not always indecision, when it is not hastiness, and as if decision were not our first necessity and our only means of salvation. I am more necessary to you than all these people; and yet, if you do not mistrust me, you do not by any means trust in me. Yet how do you think I can be useful to you, when you have recourse to my talent and my action only on the particular occasions when you are in a dilemma, and when, whether saved or not from your dilemma, losing sight of its consequences and of the necessity of a systematic course of action of which all the details should have a definite aim, you immediately thrust me aside, only to call me forth again in a fresh crisis?'

And he plainly, boldly, offers to be his habitual adviser, his *abandoned friend*, 'in short the dictator, if you will allow me the expression, of the dictator :—

'For that is what I should be, with this difference that the former should always be bound to expound and to demonstrate, whilst the latter is nobody if he allows the Government to discuss and examine. Oh! Monsieur de La Fayette, Richelieu was Richelieu against the nation for the Court, and although Richelieu did much harm to public freedom, he did a great deal of good to the monarchy. Be a Richelieu over the Court for the nation, and you will remake the monarchy, by increasing and consolidating the freedom of the people. But Richelieu had his Capuchin Joseph; do you also have your *grey Eminence*; or you will ruin yourself without saving us. *Your great qualities stand in need of my impulse; my impulse stands in need of your great qualities*; and you take the advice of little men who, for little considerations, by little manoeuvres and with little views, try to make us useless to one another, and you do not see that *you must wed yourself to me* and follow my advice, all the more because your stupid partisans have decried me, and pushed me on one side!—*Ah! you are forgetting your destiny!*'

To this appeal La Fayette remained deaf or lent only half an ear. He evaded it, as he always did, by words, compliments, half-measures, eluding the difficulties with great ability in details, putting them off, never comprehending and anticipating them; 'having neither the strength to form a good ministry, nor the courage to form too bad a one; equally incapable of breaking his word and of keeping it in time;' fonder of praise than of real power and of action; careful before all of his fame and his virtue, especially careful of his chastity. In his Memoirs, in which the man of intelligence, the man of good behaviour and good tone has concealed the faults of the politician, he himself admitted some of these wrongs: 'La Fayette, he says, was in the wrong with Mirabeau, whose immorality shocked him; though he felt a pleasure in his conversation, and in spite of a great admiration for his sublime talents, he could not help showing him a *misesteem* which hurt him.' It is well that those who put their hand to public affairs and matters which concern the safety of the people should know it, the men whom they have to face and who are often most worthy of consideration, are not precisely saints, and nothing shows a greater narrow-mindedness than to put on more saintly airs with them than is ex-

pedient. Oh! how much Mirabeau felt this when, impatient of being eternally put off by *the man of indecisions* (as he calls La Fayette), impatient of that unseasonable prudery (*pudibonderie*), angry at seeing the *respectable men* of that party always and everywhere reserved and on their guard against him, he exclaims: 'I will show them what is very true, that they have neither in their heads nor in their hearts, any element of *political sociability*.' And raising his head like a man who, with all his blemishes, also had his principle of honour and a sense of his dignity, he wrote one day (1 December 1789) to La Fayette, without fearing to touch upon the delicate point which concealed the ore:

'I have many debts, which in the mass will not amount to an enormous sum; I have many debts, and that is the best reply that events can make to the confabulations of the calumniators. But *there is not an action in my life, and even among my errors, that I cannot make good in a way to make my enemies die of shame, if they are capable of a blush.*—Believe me, Monsieur le Marquis, if that is the only way in which they are trying to stop me, my course is not run, for I am annoyed rather than weary, and weary rather than disheartened or hurt; and if they continue to deny me movement, my only answer will be to proceed.'

He did indeed proceed, and, at the present hour, those words, reproduced faithfully from the real text, will resound and reecho more loudly than ever. After his final rupture with La Fayette, writing to the Comte de Ségur who deplored it, and who, as intermediary between them, had reproached Mirabeau: 'Ah! Sir, exclaimed the latter, I am quite tranquil with regard to history; if my name survives, associated with great events, and if it recalls the idea of great weaknesses, it will also recall the ideas of a very real love of freedom, of a very decided character and of a loyalty that truly bordered on stupidity. For your sake, I desire that your friend's name may go down to posterity in like manner.' And about the same time, in a letter to M. de La Marck (3 October 1790): 'Yesterday I might have marked M. de La Fayette with an indelible blot which, so far, I only destined for him in history. I did not do so; I showed the sabre, but I did not strike. Time will strike for me soon enough.'

Meanwhile, in the Notes to the Court which he soon

had occasion to write, Mirabeau never ceased to rise up with all his power against 'that ignominious dictatorship which separated the King from his people, kept him so to say in a state of warfare with them, stood between them as an intermediary, and, in that no less unbecoming than perfidious rôle, usurped authority, respect and confidence,' absorbing all the popularity to its own profit, and allowing the throne to reap all the blame: just the contrary of a real constitutional ministry! That was indeed degrading royalty and lowering it, without however desiring a republic; for M. de La Fayette, whenever he saw it anywhere except in America, recoiled before it and interposed himself. There was his inconsistency.

However, if we go back to the last months of '89, we find Mirabeau boiling over with impatience, with 'that impatience of talent, strength and courage,' keenly sensible of his inaction and his real uselessness in spite of his numberless labours and his resounding successes, forming an admirable judgment of the Court and that royal family which he would like to serve and reconcile with the cause of the Revolution:

'There is only one thing clear, he wrote (29 December 1789), that is that they would like to find, and make use of, one of those amphibious creatures who combine the talents of a man with the soul of a lackey. *What will irremediably ruin them, is that they are afraid of men, that they always carry the little dislikes and the frail attractions of another order of things into that where the strongest is not yet strong enough*; where, though they were very strong themselves, they would still need, for the sake of public opinion, to surround themselves with strong men.'

And shortly afterwards (27 January 1790):

'On the side of the Court, oh! what bales of cotton, what fumblers! what pusillanimity! what indifference! what a grotesque assemblage of old ideas and new projects, of little dislikes and childish desires, what wills and *nîls* (*de volontés et de nolontés*), what abortive hatreds and loves!'

And he exclaims with the regret which is natural to a man who, however highly he may have been rated, feels that he has not yet shown what he can do: 'What! will the ball never, in any country in the world, come to the player!'

For a moment Mirabeau thought that the ball was really coming to him, and he took it with a sort of intoxication

and with a bound. The Count of La Marck, who had been for some months in Belgium, was recalled to Paris about the 15 March 1790 by a word from the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, the Austrian ambassador and a friend of the Queen. The latter had at length decided to take advantage of Mirabeau's advice, and she desired the Count of La Marck to carry on the communications between them.

The matter and the originals of the Correspondence are henceforth entirely open to our view. They consist of fifty Notes written by Mirabeau for the Court, and particularly for the Queen, during the last ten months of Mirabeau's life (June 1790-April 1791); besides, a number of letters and short notes which treat of the same subjects, and which were exchanged either between Mirabeau and the Count of La Marck, or between one of the two and some other intimate correspondent. The existence of these documents had long been known, and the Count of La Marck, who had been living for some years at Brussels with the title of Prince of Arenberg, had communicated them more or less completely to several persons. M. Lucas-Montigny had been admitted to consult them, and had published some faithful extracts from them in the last two volumes of his work; M. Droz had made use of those notions with much sagacity and judgment, in the third volume of his *Considerations on the Reign of Louis XVI.* But history was entitled to demand a full and entire communication, without any reticence. That was also Mirabeau's wish. This Correspondence was hardly begun when he carefully put the pages on one side, and he sent them to M. de La Marck (15 July 1790) with these words: 'Here, my dear Count, are two packets which you will deliver to me alone, whatever may happen, and which in case of death you will communicate to any one who takes sufficient interest in my memory to defend it. Put some cautious but precise mark on these two packets.' The Count of La Marck grasped all the importance of this charge; and if he put off the accomplishment of it until after his death, we cannot be surprised; for it needed perhaps the circumstances which have recently occurred in Europe, and the ability to understand everything in the way of wholesome political truths, for the mind of the public to be ready to receive these documents, as it will do without any doubt. No moment could be better chosen

than the present. M. de Bacourt, charged, by the last will of the Prince of Arenberg, with the delicate task of this publication, has carried it out with an elevated and simple spirit, which comprehends, explains, arranges everything, which throws a light on every point of the precious trust which has been laid upon him, whilst he has the modesty to efface himself before the principal persons whose figures he illumines and sets off. The three principal persons concerned are the Queen, Mirabeau and the Count of La Marck himself, the latter very worthy to be associated with the two others by reason of his excellent judgment, his delicacy and firmness of observation, his knowledge of men and things, his devotion to the misfortune of a Queen and the friendship of a great man, fully justifying to-day in the eyes of posterity what he wrote one day to Mirabeau : ' God has placed me on earth only to love and watch over your fame.'

Nothing, indeed, could reflect more honour on Mirabeau's political reputation than the contents of these divers Notes and the general spirit which animates them. Alas ! there is only one thing wanting in these counsels, to make us quite happy and comfortable in our admiration in gathering them from the lips of the statesman and the man of genius : it is that they should have been given gratuitously. We say once more that there lies Mirabeau's sore point, and, even if we extenuate it as far as is convenient, it still remains an awkward blot. No, Mirabeau did not sell himself, but he took money ; there is a shade of difference. Having said so much, let us quickly turn away our eyes and fix them on the substance, on the elevation of the aim and the ideas. Among these fifty Notes there is hardly one from which we could not quote passages which are, not merely eloquent, but true and just, and whose prophecies were only too well justified by experience. Never were the faults more clearly shown in advance, never was a present situation better described, defined, probed, never was a remedy more clearly indicated, if on such a matter we may call a remedy what was never put to the test of application. How steadfast and persevering is Mirabeau in urging the royal couple ! How strongly he insists that they cannot go back a single inch from what the Revolution has accomplished ! and how great, how broad and full is his conception of the real constitutional



monarchy, as it has never been realised in France ! O you Doctrinaires, do not come to-day and demand that monarchy, Mirabeau's monarchy ; it was never yours ! In reading him, we experience at every moment a keen sense of the beauty and the grandeur of the political idea, that severe, judicious, yet living beauty, which aspires to realisation in practice and action. Hitherto we knew Mirabeau the orator ; here, in this series of views and considerations, the counsellor and the statesman in him come to light and blend together. The failings which we still remark here and there, the deviations and the errors which are born especially of the impetuosity and the conflict of his different talents, may perhaps be explained by the fact that he was not placed by fortune in a position to be entirely and always the statesman that he is so often ; we are justified in believing that all he needed was to be lifted, once for all, to his proper level and into his highest sphere.

To be completely the politician and the statesman and at the same time to remain a mere intimate and mysterious counsellor, Mirabeau had to moderate and sacrifice his instincts and appetites as an eloquent and popular speaker, and he could not always resign himself to that necessity. Supposing for a moment that Mirabeau had been a Minister, an open defender of the constitutional throne, and holding it an honour to be so, he would have made that sacrifice without any doubt, or rather there would have been no sacrifice to make : the orator would simply have turned round, and faced the attack upon the breach that he had himself made. Talent would have remained satisfied with a new rôle full of brilliance and power. But here it was not the case : he was obliged to continue and to feign a rôle in public which he abdicated in secret. It was a false and soon an unbearable position for a talent so frank and so fiery. The struggle of the two men within him is interesting and sometimes painful to study, to-day that we have his whole life both public and secret on two parallel columns, so to say, and in double entry. How could any one believe, if he had not the proofs before his eyes, that on the very days when he appeared most ardent and most aggressive in the Assembly, whether on the question of the tricolor flag to be flown by the fleet, or on the pillage of the Castries mansion by the populace, or on

any other burning question, that on those very days, on the day before or the day after, he was writing wise, well-balanced, quite political advice for the Court? There might at times have entered some calculation into these violent outbursts of Mirabeau in the Assembly; for after all he was obliged from time to time to repair and renovate his popularity, his great instrument of power. But what he was before all else on these days when he escaped from others and himself, was a sincere, impetuous orator, warming to the game and carried away by it, an orator who had promised to be prudent, and who suddenly exploded. Towards the end, the orator in Mirabeau complicated the politician and crossed the statesman, just as the impetuous Rhône fertilises, enriches and also at times inundates the Comtat and the Provence. The talent of speech, when possessed in that degree, is an instrument of power as well as a source of illusion and temptation for him who possesses it. The judgment is tempted to turn back upon the solemn and vast ideas which are expressed so well and with so much applause. One loves to hear oneself thundering when one awakens so many echoes. On the morrow of those at times incendiary outbursts and of what have been called his oratorical *hemorrhages*, Mirabeau had much to make good and to excuse at Court, and he did not succeed in gaining a confidence in that quarter which in any case would never have been more than half accorded to him.

I can only rapidly touch upon these Notes to indicate their tone. The first are above all intended as an attack upon La Fayette whom the Queen certainly did not love, but who was believed at the Tuileries to be the necessary man. Mirabeau points out that this self-styled necessary man, by paralysing all, is ruining all, and that he is allowing the monarchy and society with it to fall little by little into a state of entire disorganisation. And here the mortal adversary declares himself; his opposition of views and his natural antipathy let themselves go:

‘It is too late, he writes (on the 20 June 1792, the eve of the Federation), for half-confidences and half-services. We have sufficient proofs that La Fayette is as incapable as he is ambitious. He is about to have himself nominated generalissimo, that is to say, to have the generalship assigned to him, that is to say that he is about to receive the dictatorship *de facto*, of what

is the nation, or of what appears to be the nation. His whole plan as regards the present, lies there. As for a plan, he has none. Means he receives at the hands of every day. His whole policy lies in raising such a ferment among our neighbours, that he is allowed the power of extending over the whole kingdom the influence of the Court. In this state of things the only hope lies in the imbecility of his character, in the timidity of his soul and the shortness of his head.<sup>1</sup> *The King has only one man, that is his wife. For her safety lies solely in the restoration of the royal authority. I like to think that she would not wish for life without her crown; but what I am very sure of, is that she will not preserve her life if she does not preserve her crown.*

'The moment will come, and that soon, when she will have to try what can be done by a woman and a child on horseback; for her it is a family method; but, meanwhile, they must stand on guard and not believe that they will be able, either by the aid of chance, or by the aid of combinations, to get out of an extraordinary crisis by ordinary men and means.'

Mirabeau never ceases, every time, to ring the tocsin to rouse the Court out of its torpor, the King out of his inertia, and to induce the Queen to put as much order into her ideas as she does heart:

'Four enemies are coming up at the double, he writes on the 13 August 1790, the impost, bankruptcy, the army, the winter. . . . Once more, we must fix upon the conception of a great plan, and for that we must have a definite aim. The developments are easy, the occasions frequent, promptitude and ability will not be wanting in the secret council; even chiefs we shall find. What I do not yet see is a will, and I repeat that I demand to go and determine it, that is to say to demonstrate that, outside of that, even to-day, there is no salvation.'

And drawing the situation with touches of fire, he is not afraid of uttering the word scaffold and of pointing at the fatal thing in the distance. He continually returns to that idea of a plan and an order:

'(17 August 1790.) It is certain that the moment has come for deciding between an active rôle and a passive rôle; for the

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<sup>1</sup> Physiologically, it is curious to compare the shape and the bulk in the two foreheads, Mirabeau's which is fulness itself, and La Fayette's which is receding. There is the limitation: it leaps to the eyes. One day somebody remarked, looking at the bust or the medallion of La Fayette by David, that the forehead was very receding: "Yes, replied the artist, and yet I have sustained it as much as I could."

latter, bad as I believe it to be, is not so bad in my eyes as that *intercadence* of experiments and resignation, of irresolution and dejection, which arouses distrust, confirms usurpations, and hovers from inconsistency to inconsistency.'

This general plan of conduct, which he advises ad nauseam, he has quite ready, and he proposes it, he renews it and varies it unceasingly, to its smallest details, according to bases which he esteems essential and fundamental. As we read him we admire his wealth of ideas and resources, of which he has too many rather than too few; and if, instead of advising, he were in a position to act, he would certainly have enough to choose from and to prune. But among all these varieties of means, it is always public opinion that he tries to bring into play as the great lever: 'Public opinion has destroyed everything, it is for public opinion to restore.' It is not a *coup de main* nor a *coup d'état* that he is prompting, it is a constitutional king that he is trying to create. He spends his efforts in trying to work in Louis XVI that transformation of an honest and timid king, an impulsive and feeble king, into a firm and open king, who will go with head erect, who will dare to do all that is necessary for his own salvation, for that of the monarchy and of society. If Louis XVI decides to leave Paris as he advises him to do, he must not do so by flight or anything that looks like an evasion, for 'a king only departs in open day if he desires to be a king.' In every Note Mirabeau renews his counsels, his cries of alarm. He is well aware that they are not being followed: 'I am listened to with more kindness than confidence; more interest is shown in knowing than in following my counsels.' Very often he is seized with impatience and even with contempt for that royal blindness: 'One would think that the house in which they sleep might be reduced to cinders without their being touched or even awakened.' Whereupon M. de La Marck replies: 'You advise them too much as if they had a part of your character. You should accustom yourself to see them as they are.' And the same La Marck wrote to the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau: 'The King has not the least energy; the other day M. de Montmorin told me sadly that, when he spoke to him of his affairs and his position, he might have been speaking to him of things concerning the Emperor of China.'

Mirabeau saw the Queen only once at Saint-Cloud, on

the 3 July 1790. It is deeply to be regretted that such conferences could not be repeated : she was the only one by whom he could hope to be understood.

I have said that none of Mirabeau's advice is counter-revolutionary, and that on no supposition does he admit that they can go back upon the great points gained in '89 :

' Indeed, he says in his forty-seventh Note, the most detailed of all (December 1790), I regard all the effects of the Revolution and all that deserves to be preserved in the Constitution as conquests so irrevocable, that no upheaval, unless it were so great as to dismember the empire, could again destroy them. I do not except even an armed counter-revolution ; even though the kingdom were reconquered, the victor would still be obliged to compound with public opinion, to assure himself of the goodwill of the people, to consent to the destruction of abuses, to admit the people to the making of the laws, to allow his administrators to be chosen for him ; that is to say, even after a civil war, he would still have to return to the plan which it is possible to carry out without a shock.'

This is a prophetic look into the future which marked out for future Restorations their limit and even their laws.

I have only been able to arouse a desire to consult these memorable Notes, which are made to be read and thought over by all who concern themselves with politics to-day. Luminous lessons flash out from them on all hands ; but, to take them in, to apply them to circumstances both analogous and different, no doubt requires some of the spirit which dictated them. Mirabeau's last note to the Count of La Marck, dated the 24 March 1791, that is to say nine days before his death, ends with these words : ' O thoughtless and thrice thoughtless nation ! ' Will that always be with us the conclusion and the last moral ?

## MADemoiselle de Scudéry

Monday, May 12, 1851.

It is not a rehabilitation that I am going to attempt, but it is well to put exact ideas under certain names that frequently recur. Mlle de Scudéry's books are no longer read, but they are still cited ; her name serves to designate a literary kind, a fashion in bel-esprit at a celebrated hour : it is a medal that has almost ended by passing into circulation and becoming current coin. What is the value and the title of it ? Let us imitate Mlle de Scudéry a little in what she was so fond of doing herself : let us examine, distinguish and analyse.

This maiden lady, of an extraordinary merit as they used to say, was born at Havre in 1607, in the reign of Henri IV ; she died in 1701, at the age of ninety-four years, towards the end of the reign of *Louis quatorzième*, as she was fond of calling him. Her father was of Provence ; he had migrated to Normandy and married there, not without passing on to his children some of his southern vein. The son, George de Scudéry, is celebrated for his tufted poetry, for his boastings and his rodomontades in which he one day had the misfortune to meet and offend Corneille : posterity has not forgiven him that. Mlle Madeleine de Scudéry was much more sensible than her brother ; the Norman portion, if I may dare to call it so, was much more apparent in her : she reasons, she discusses, she pleads in intellectual matters like the cleverest of solicitors or pettifoggers. It appears however that she too had her good share of the family vanity ; she was always saying : *Since the overthrow of our house . . .* ' You would think she were speaking of the overthrow of the Greek Empire,' remarked the malicious Tallemant des Réaux. The Scudéry's' pretension, in fact, was that they were sprung from a very noble, very ancient and *always warlike* house,

that originally came from the kingdom of Naples, and had been settled for centuries in Provence. When she transformed the persons of her acquaintance into the heroes and princes of her novels, Mlle de Scudéry thought she was not going outside of the family. Having lost her parents in her childhood, Mlle de Scudéry was adopted by an uncle who lived in the country, an honourable and well-educated man, who had her very well educated and much better than was usual in the case of the girls of that day. Writing, orthography, dancing, drawing, painting, needle-work, she learned everything, as we are told by Conrart, and what she did not learn she guessed of herself : ' As she had even at that time a prodigious imagination, an excellent memory, an exquisite judgment, a lively humour and was naturally curious to know all the curious things she saw done and all the praiseworthy things she heard said, she learned of her own accord everything that appertained to agriculture, gardening, housekeeping, the country and the kitchen ; the causes and effects of maladies, the composition of an infinite number of remedies, of perfumes, of scented waters, and of useful or gallant distillations intended for necessity or pleasure. She was desirous of learning to play the lute, and she took some lessons in it with a fair success.' But the lute demanded too much time, and, though she did not give it up, she preferred to turn her attention particularly to intellectual occupations. She learned Italian and Spanish to perfection, and her principal pleasure was in reading and choice conversations, of which the neighbourhood was not destitute. This picture which Conrart draws of Mlle de Scudéry's early education quite reminds us of Mme de Genlis' early education in Burgundy, and I will say at once that after closely studying her, as I have just done, Mlle de Scudéry appears to me to have many points in common with Mme de Genlis, with the addition of virtue. To learn everything, to know everything, from the properties of simples and the making of preserves, to the anatomy of the human heart, to be early regarded as a perfection and a wonder, to extract from everything that goes on in society the matter for a novel, a portrait, a moral dissertation, a compliment and a lesson, to unite a fund of pedantry with an extreme shrewdness of observation and a perfect knowledge of the world, those are ambitions which

are common to both of them ; the differences however are no less essential to note. Mlle de Scudéry, ' who was very pleasing of mien ' and of rather grand air, had no beauty : ' She is a tall, thin and dark lady, with a very long face,' we are told by Tallemant. She was gifted with moral qualities which she was never false to. Consideration and esteem were with her never dissociated from the idea of celebrity and fame. In a word, she was a *Genlis* of the time of Louis XIII, full of strength and virtue, who remained an old maid to the age of ninety-four. These points of difference or resemblance will stand out more fully as we proceed and there will be no need to emphasize them.

And besides, one should hear her speak of herself, whenever she is able to do so under a light disguise. In most of her dialogues, when she makes her characters converse, she contrives, whenever one of them says a neat thing, to make the other reply : ' All that you say is very well said. . . . All that is marvellously thought of ' A favourite expression of hers is . ' That is very well *unravell'd*.' These indirect compliments addressed to herself recur incessantly, and she is inexhaustible in formulas of self-approval. She has half described herself in the person of Sappho, in the tenth volume of the *Grand Cyrus*, and this name of Sappho clung to her. *The illustrious Sappho*, that is what those who had read *Le Grand Cyrus* invariably called Mlle de Scudéry. I quote a few passages of that Portrait, in which she certainly gave a reflexion of herself. After speaking of the long string of ancestors which her heroine was able to count up .

' Sappho, she added, has besides had the advantage that her father and mother both had much wit and much virtue ; but she had the misfortune of losing them so early, that she was able to receive from them only the first inclinations to the good, for she was only six years old when they died. It is true that they left her in the charge of a kinswoman. . . . '

The uncle is here changed into a female relative ; but all the rest still applies to her :

' Indeed, Madame (one of the characters is supposed to be addressing the *Queen of Pontus*), I do not think that the whole of Greece ever possessed a person who can be compared with Sappho. I will not tarry however, Madame, to tell you what



her childhood was : for she was so little of a child, that at twelve years of age people began to speak of her as a person whose beauty, whose mind and judgment were already formed and aroused the admiration of all the world ; but I will merely tell you that never in anybody were remarked more noble inclinations, nor a greater facility in learning all that she desired to know.'

And bravely attacking the chapter of beauty, she is still thinking of herself when she says :

' Although you hear me speak of Sappho as the most wonderful and the most charming lady in all Greece, you must not however imagine that her beauty is one of those great beauties in which even envy can find no fault . . . She is however capable of inspiring greater passions than the greatest beauties of the earth. . . . As for *complexion*, hers is not one of extreme whiteness ; it is however of so beautiful a brilliance that one may say that it is beautiful ; but what is sovereignly pleasing in Sappho, is that she has eyes so beautiful, so bright, so amorous and so full of intelligence, that one can neither bear their brilliance nor take one's eyes off her. . . . What forms their *greatest* brilliance, is that there never was a *greater* contrast than that of the white and the black of her eyes. However, this *great* contrast produces no harshness. . . .'

One cannot help remarking the careless style, the repetitions, the prolixities. And yet I abridge considerably, a thing that Mlle de Scudéry never does ; I leave out, as I proceed, many *but*s and *for*s and *although*s. But, from these touches alone, one has more than a glimpse of the ideal she was not sorry to present of her beauty, or, if you prefer it, the qualification of her ugliness. Such was the Sappho of the Marais as she may have appeared for a moment to prepossessed eyes, at a time when Chapelain passed for a great epic poet and intrepidly compared her to the Maid, and on the day when Pellisson, the ugliest of beaux-esprits, made her his passionate declaration.

And still continuing this Portrait of Sappho, which is valuable to us, she comes at length to the charms of the mind, on which she enlarges with a redoubled complacency :

' For the charms of her mind greatly surpass those of her beauty. Indeed, she has a mind of such vast extent, that one may say that what she does not comprehend cannot be comprehended by anybody, and she has such a disposition to learn easily whatever she wishes to know, that, though nobody ever heard say that Sappho learned anything, she yet knows everything.'

Then follows an enumeration of her accomplishments, poetry, prose, improvised songs :

' She even expresses so delicately sentiments the most difficult to express, and she is so well able to *make the anatomy of a loving heart*, if it is permitted to speak thus, that she is able to describe exactly all its jealousies, all its uneasiness, all its impatience, all its joys, all its dislikes, all its murmurs, all its despairs, all its hopes, all its revolts, and all those tumultuous feelings, which are never well known but to those who feel them or have felt them.'

It was one of Mlle de Scudéry's pretensions, to know to that degree and to describe so well the most secret movements of love without ever having felt them except by reflexion, and she is often indeed successful in respect of the delicacy and refinement, of all except the passion itself. ' You explain that so admirably, we might say to her with one of the characters in her dialogues, that if you had done nothing all your life but love, you could not speak of it better.'—' If I have never loved, she would reply, giving us her loveliest smile, I have friends who have loved for me and who have taught me to speak of it.' There you have wit however, and Mlle de Scudéry had abundance of it.

In this Portrait of Sappho, which is in so great part her own, she insists strongly on the fact that Sappho not only knows thoroughly all that appertains to *love*, but that she is no less acquainted with all that concerns *generosity* ; and this great paragon of knowledge and nature is, according to her, also crowned with modesty :

' Indeed, her conversation is so natural, so easy and so gallant, that one never hears her say in general conversation anything but the things that a person of great intellect may be supposed to say without having learned all that she knows. Not but that the people who know things know very well that nature alone could not have opened her mind to the extent that she has done, but the fact is that she is so mindful of keeping within the proprieties of her sex, that she hardly ever speaks but of that *which* ladies ought to speak.'

I leave the grammatical mistake, which would be one for us. But here we must admit that we have a Sappho who is quite discreet and modest, quite in accordance with the tradition of the seventeenth century, and the latest good taste of the Place-Royale and the Hôtel Rambouillet.

Mlle de Scudéry was not long indeed before making her appearance there. The provinces did not hold her long. Having lost her uncle, she hesitated between Rouen and Paris; but her brother, who then took rank among the dramatic authors and whose plays were successful at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, persuaded her to come and settle in the capital. There she appeared at once with success, she was welcomed and celebrated in the best societies, and began to write novels, without however putting her name to them and hiding behind that of her very vainglorious brother. *Ibrahim ou l'Illustre Bassa* began to appear in 1641; *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus*, in 1650; and *Clélie* in 1654.

Mlle de Scudéry's true date belongs to this moment, to the hour of the Regency, to the fair days of Anne of Austria, before and after the Fronde, and her fame endured without any check until Boileau came and attacked it, like a true mar-joy that he was: 'This Despréaux, said Segrais, can do nothing but speak of himself and criticise others: why speak ill of Mlle de Scudéry as he has done?'

In order rightly to understand Mlle de Scudéry's success and the direction she gave to her talent, one should picture to oneself the high society of Paris as it was before the establishment of Louis XIV. For some years there had reigned a taste for intellectual things, for literary bel-esprit, into which there entered much more zeal and emulation than discretion and lights. D'Urfé's romance, Balzac's Letters, the great success of the drama, the plays of Corneille and other authors in vogue, the rather pedantic, but real and efficacious patronage of Cardinal de Richelieu, the foundation of the French Academy, all these causes had developed a great curiosity, especially among the women, who felt that the moment for them to bring society to their level was come. They threw off the yoke of antiquity and the learned languages; they wanted to know their mother tongue, and applied to the grammarians by profession. Men of the world made themselves intermediaries between the savants properly speaking and the drawing-rooms: the desire was to please and instruct at the same time. But these first attempts of a serious and polished society were accompanied by great inexperience. To render to Mlle de Scudéry all the justice that is due to her, and give her her true title, we should con-

sider her as one of the *instructresses* of society, at this moment of formation and transition. That was her rôle and, in great part, her purpose.

In that Portrait and history of Sappho, which may be read near the end of the *Grand Cyrus*, she shows how far she is penetrated by her purpose, and she brings to it more tact and more niceties than, from her reputation at this distance of time, we should suppose her capable of. Do not take her for a *bel-esprit* by profession, she disclaims the character at the very first: 'There is nothing more inconvenient, she thinks, than to be a *bel-esprit* or to be treated as such, when one has a noble heart and some birth.' She is more sensible than anybody to all the disadvantages of being a *bel-esprit* (especially for a woman), who is accepted by the world in that character, and she describes them like a girl of good sense and a young lady of quality who has suffered from them. One of the greatest of these disadvantages, which causes most annoyance, is that worldly people cannot imagine it possible to address a *bel-esprit* in the same way as any other person, and to speak to her otherwise than in the *high-style*:

'For I see men and women speak to me sometimes, who are in a strange embarrassment, because they have taken it into their heads that they must not say the same things to me as to other people. In vain do I speak to them of the beauty of the season, of the news that are going round and of all the things that go to make up ordinary conversation, they always come back to their point: and they are so convinced that I am forcing myself to speak thus to them, that they force themselves to speak to me of other things that are so overpowering to me that I should like to cease to be Sappho when that mischance befalls me.'

I ask pardon of the reader for the many *thats* and *whens* in favour of the idea, which is just. So Mlle de Scudéry is really very sensible to the drawbacks of being a *femme bel-esprit* and a *femme savante*. Long before Molière she said more than one very sensible thing on the subject. But let us not forget the moment of society and the kind of difficulties she had to do with. She carefully discusses the question whether it would be a good thing, in general, for women to know more than they do know: 'Although I am a declared enemy of all the women who put on learned

airs, I yet consider the other extreme very blameworthy and am often appalled to see so many women of quality with an ignorance so gross, that, in my opinion, they dishonour our sex.' There indeed was the defect which had first to be remedied. The education of the ladies of quality was, at this date of 1641-1654, most defective. For one La Fayette and one Sévigné, how much ignorance and strange neglect, even among women of wit and renown! Mme de Sablé, the witty friend of La Rochefoucauld, could not spell a word correctly. 'It is certain, said Mlle de Scudéry, that there are women who speak well, who write badly, and who write badly purely through their own fault. . . . It is, I think, an intolerable mistake in all women, she adds, to claim that they *speak well* and *write badly*. . . . Most of the ladies seem to write in order not to be understood, so little connection is there in their words, and so odd is their spelling. Yet these same ladies, who so boldly make such gross mistakes in writing, who lose all their wit as soon as they begin to write, will scoff for whole days at a poor foreigner who has used one word for another.' One of the improvements which Mlle de Scudéry urged and to which she contributed most, was to establish an agreement between the manner of talking and that of writing. She made those of her sex blush for their inconsistency. To write according to principles and even to a certain extent to talk according to principles, was the double result of her teaching and her example. Her ideas on the education of women were full of justice and moderation in theory :

' Seriously, she writes, is there anything more grotesque than to see how people ordinarily act in the education of women? They do not wish them to be coquettes or galantes, and yet they carefully permit them to learn everything that is proper to gallantry, without permitting them to know anything that may fortify their virtue or occupy their mind. Indeed, do not all those big scoldings we give them in their childhood, that they are not neat enough, that they do not dress in good enough style and do not sufficiently study the lessons which their dancing and singing masters give them, prove what I say? And how singular it is that a woman who may not with propriety dance more than five or six years of her life, should employ ten or twelve in learning continually what she must not do for more than five or six; and yet this same person who is obliged to use her judgment until her death, and to speak until her last breath, is

taught nothing that may enable her to speak more agreeably, or make her act with more discretion !'

The conclusion she comes to, which she only gives with some reserve (for in a matter that concerns the *diversity of minds* there can be no *universal law*), her conclusion, I say, is that whilst she would like women to know more than they do, she does not wish them ever to act or speak learnedly : ' I should like it to be said of a person of my sex that she knows a hundred things that she does not boast of knowing, that she has a very enlightened mind, that she has a discriminating knowledge of beautiful works, that she speaks well, that she writes correctly and that she knows the world ; but I do not wish it to be said of her that *she is a femme savante* ; for the two characters are so different that there is no resemblance between them.' Here, I say again, is reason, and there is much of it in Mlle de Scudéry's books, mingled, it is true, with far too much reasoning and discoursing, and drowned besides in what to us to-day appears romantic extravagance.

What to us is extravagance was however the very thing that enabled this teaching to pass from hand to hand, and made it to reach its destination more surely. Tallemant tells us that in talking she had the tone of a *magister* and *preacher*, which was by no means agreeable : this tone was disguised in her novels when it was put into the mouth of her characters, and to-day it requires a certain study to discover the didactic language at the back of it. Of real imagination and invention, Mlle de Scudéry had none : when she wished to construct and invent a plot, she adopted the machinery in use at the time ; she furnished herself in the fashionable storehouse and wardrobe : she copied the process of d'Urfé in his *Astrée*. In doing so, she flattered herself that she was still reconciling the Story with history, art with probability : ' A wise man, she thought, is never allowed to invent things that are incredible. The true art of falsehood lies in making it resemble the truth.' There is a conversation in *Clélie* in which they discuss the question *Of the manner of inventing a plot* and of composing novels. Mlle de Scudéry comes very near to preaching observation of nature : she makes the poet Anacreon deliver some rules of rhetoric almost as good as any we could find in Quintilian. It is a pity that she did not practise them

better than she does. It would be impossible to speak of Mlle de Scudéry's novels to-day and to analyse them without calumniating her, so absurd do they appear to us. We should be ascribing to her alone too much of what was the eccentricity of the time. To rightly appreciate her novels as such, we should have to go back to the models she set before herself and to write the history of quite a branch of literature. What strikes us at first sight in her novels, is that she takes all the persons of her acquaintance and of society, disguises them as Romans, Greeks, Persians or Carthaginians, and makes them play with respect to the principal events nearly the same parts that are assigned to them in history, whilst making them talk and think just as she saw them talk and think in the Marais. *Amilcar* is the poet *Sarasin*; *Herminius* is *Pellisson*. *Conrart* has become *Cléodamas*, and he has a pretty country-house near *Agrigentum* which is described at length, and which is no other than that of *Athys*, near *Paris*. If she meets with an historical character, she brings it into harmony with the people of her acquaintance; she will say of *Brutus*, the man who condemned his sons and drove out the *Tarquins*, that he was born 'with the most gallant, the most gentle and the most agreeable wit in the world;' and of the poet *Alcaeus* she will say that he was 'a clever fellow, full of wit and a great intriguer.' The actions and conduct of all these persons (so much are they travestied) almost harmonise with this factitious way of presenting them; the same shade of unreality covers the whole. But how is it, you will say, that such novel, had such a vogue and so great a sale? How could the youth of *Mme de Sévigné* and *Mme de La Fayette* feed upon them? In the first place, at that time one had no true idea of the genius of the different periods and of the profound difference of manners in history. Besides, almost all the persons who figure in Mlle de Scudéry's novels were living persons and contemporaries whose names were known, whose portraits and characters were recognised, from the great *Cyrus* who was supposed to be the great *Condé*, down to *Doralise* who was *Mlle Robineau*. All these persons, even the most subordinate, were known in society; the key was passed round, the masks were given a name; and even now, wherever we know the real names, we cannot peruse the pages without some curiosity.

' You could not believe, says Tallemant, how the ladies are pleased to be in her novels, or, to speak more correctly, to see their Portraits in them ; for we must not look for more than the *characters* of the persons, we shall not find their actions. Some however have complained. . . . ' Among those who complained was one of the wittiest women of the time, one of those who uttered most of those witticisms which cut to the quick and which have survived. In the sixth volume of the *Grand Cyrus* Mlle de Scudéry gave the Portrait of Mme Cornuel under the name of *Zénocrite*, and she made her one of the most agreeable and the most dreaded mockers of *Lycia*. The Portrait is very accurate. Mme Cornuel justified her reputation as a bold mocker when she said of Mlle de Scudéry, who was very dark-skinned, that one could see clearly that ' she was intended by Providence to blacken paper, since she sweated ink through every pore.' One of Molière's Martons or Dorines could not have improved on this.

What is remarkable and really uncommon in Mlle de Scudéry's novels are the Conversations which her persons hold, and for which she had a singular talent, a real vocation. Later, when her novels had already gone out of fashion, she published extracts of these Conversations in little volumes which appeared successively to the number of ten (she nearly always proceeded by tens). ' Mlle de Scudéry has just sent me two little volumes of *Conversations*, wrote Mme de Sévigné to her daughter (25 September 1680) ; it is impossible that that should not be good, when it is not drowned in her big novel.' These little volumes, and others of the same kind which followed and which make Mlle de Scudéry's old age acceptable, are still sought after by the curious and those to whom nothing is indifferent that concerns the great century. It is not uncommon to hear it said that Mlle de Scudéry's novels are detestable and unreadable, but that that is not so with her *Conversations*. It is well to know however that these *Conversations*, at least all the early ones, are taken word for word from the *Cyrus*, the *Clélie* and her other novels.

One of the first subjects she treats of is that of *Conversation* itself : ' As Conversation is the bond of the society of all men, the greatest pleasure of well-bred people and the most ordinary means of introducing not only politeness into the world, but also the purest morality and the



love of glory and virtue, it appears to me that the company cannot be more agreeably nor more usefully occupied, says *Cilénie* (one of the persons she loves), than in examining what that is that we call Conversation.' And they begin to consider what a conversation should be in order to be agreeable and worthy of a company of well-bred people; and, for that, it should not be either too much confined to family and domestic subjects, nor turned to purely futile subjects and those concerning dress, as so often happens when women are among themselves: 'Are you not obliged to confess, remarks one of Mlle de Scudéry's interlocutors, that if anybody should write all that fifteen or twenty women say when they are together, he would produce the worst book in the world?' And that even if there were many women of wit among these fifteen or twenty. But let a single man enter, and not even one of the most distinguished, and this same conversation will be raised and will suddenly become more regulated, more intelligent and more agreeable. In short, 'the most amiable women in the world, when they are gathered together without any men, will hardly ever say anything that is worth hearing, and will be more bored than if they were alone. But it is not the same with men who are really well-bred. Their conversation is no doubt less lively when there are no women present, than when there are; but, ordinarily, though it is more serious, it does not fail to be rational; and they can in short dispense with us more easily than we can dispense with them.' Those are shrewd remarks, which testify to experience of the world and almost of the heart. The whole of this chapter *Of Conversation* shows true observation; and, after considering the different faults of a conversation, *Cilénie* or *Valérie*, or rather the authoress, in a résumé the only fault of which is that it is too precise and too methodical, comes to the conclusion that, in order not to be wearisome, in order to be both beautiful and rational, conversation should not be limited to a single subject, but should be formed of a little of everything: 'I imagine, she says, that speaking generally, it should more frequently be about ordinary and gallant things than about great things: I imagine however that nothing should be excluded from it; that it should be free and diversified according to times, places and the persons among whom one

happens to be ; and that the secret is always to speak nobly of vulgar things, rather simply of elevated things, and very gallantly of gallant things, without eagerness and without affectation.' But what is more necessary to make it pleasing and diverting, is ' that it should have a *certain spirit of politeness* which will absolutely banish all bitter raileries, as well as any that may in the least offend modesty. . . . I should wish that there should reign in it besides a *certain spirit of joy*.' All this is no doubt as well said and as pleasing as it is judicious, as one of the persons does not fail to remark in the Conversation. After this chapter read that which treats *Of the manner of writing letters* (in part an extract from *Clélie*, and to be found in the *Conversations nouvelles*), and you will understand that, beneath this novelist who at this distance appears to us extravagant, there was in Mlle de Scudéry a serious Genlis, a Miss Edgeworth ; in short, what shall I say ? an excellent *boarding-school mistress* of the higher society and the young ladies of quality in the seventeenth century.

In the same way she treats every conceivable subject, she gives a complete little course of lectures, often too complete, in which she combines the historical examples she has collected with the anecdotes which she gathers in the society of her time. She analyses everything, she discourses on everything, on perfumes, on pleasures, on desires, on qualities and virtues ; on one occasion even she makes observations, almost as if she were a physicist or a naturalist, on the colour of the wings and the flight of the butterfly. She conjectures, she refines, she symbolises ; she seeks and gives reasons for everything. Never did any one make greater use of the word *for*. There are days when she is a grammarian, an academician, when she discourses on the synonymy of words and carefully discriminates their acceptations ; wherein differ *joy* and *cheerfulness* ; whether *magnificence* is not a heroic quality and royal quality rather than a virtue, for magnificence befits only a few persons, whilst the virtues should befit all the world ; how *magnanimity* comprises more things than *generosity*, which usually has narrower limits, so that a person may be sometimes very generous without necessarily being really magnanimous. There are some little Essays of hers which are charmingly presented, such as that

*De l'Ennui sans sujet.* In some respects Mlle de Scudéry appears to us in these *Conversations* as the Nicomachus of women, with more shrewdness perhaps, but also with a fund of pedantry and stiffness which we do not find in the ingenious theologian. And then Nicole always ends with God and the consideration of the supreme end, whilst Mlle de Scudéry always ends up with the praise and the apotheosis of the King; she does so with a particular adroitness and ingenuity which was remarked by Bayle and which is nevertheless a little displeasing.

In fact, this estimable lady, long ill-treated by fortune, had early contracted the habit of making compliments which might be useful to her: there was a little calculation at the bottom of all her bad taste. No one ever combined more insipid praise with that mania she had for correcting the little faults of the society around her. What would you have her do? she had to sell her books, and to find illustrious patrons for them. And then, to describe at great length as she did her friends and acquaintances, their town-houses and their country-houses, all that served, while flattering them, to fill up pages and swell the volume. *Sappho* was not above all these little trade reasons: 'Faith, says Tallemant, she needs to set every stone in motion; while I think of it, I pardon her.' Little presents, gratifications, pensions, she loved to add these positive proofs to consideration, which never failed her. All this contributes a little to lower the moralist in her, and to limit her outlook within the narrow circle of the society of the day.

In certain passages however we seem to be aware of a firm and almost virile mind, which approaches elevated subjects with a dialectical subtilty, which comprehends their divers aspects, and which, always adhering to time-honoured opinions, is determined above all by considerations of propriety.

Mlle de Scudéry was approaching her sixtieth year when Boileau appeared and, in his first Satires (1665), scoffed at the big novels and relegated the *Cyrus* to the number of those works which only a country squire could be excused for admiring. This war boldly declared by Boileau against a factitious kind of literature that had had its day, and which only subsisted through a remnant of superstition, dealt it a fatal blow, and since that day Mlle de

Scudéry was for the younger generation nothing more than an out-of-date authoress. Mme de La Fayette helped to reduce her entirely to the rank of venerable antiques by the publishing of her two little novels, *Zaïde* and especially *La Princesse de Clèves*, in which she showed how one could be brief, natural and delicate. It would be vain to-day to protest against that irrefragable sentence and to enumerate all the comforting testimonies in favour of Mlle de Scudéry, the letters of Mascaron, of Fléchier, of Mme Brinon, the Superior of Saint-Cyr, of Mme Dacier, the eulogies of Godeau, Segrais, Huet, Bouhours or Pellisson. The latter, who grieved and supplanted Conrart, became, as we know, Mlle de Scudéry's acknowledged lover, her platonic worshipper, and he celebrated her in twenty gallant poems under the name of *Sappho*. But if anything can prove to me that Pellisson, in spite of his elegance and purity of diction, was never a true Attic and that he was always ignorant of the true graces, it is precisely his declared taste for such an idol. We can infer nothing from the compliments which Mme de Sévigné and Mme de Maintenon addressed to Mlle de Scudéry in her old age: these ladies of good grace and great good-breeding continued to respect in her, when they spoke face to face with her, one of the admirations of their youth. And as to all those other names which are cited (I except none, neither Fléchier nor Mascaron nor Bouhours), please observe that they do not shine by good taste, by a sound and judicious taste; they have all more or less preserved a pronounced colouring of the Hôtel Rambouillet, and they are in certain respects behind their age. Admiration for Mlle de Scudéry is a touchstone which tests and judges them.

The French Academy awarded for the first time in 1671 the prize of Eloquence founded by Balzac. This prize was originally given for a sort of discourse or sermon on some Christian virtue. The first subject set by Balzac himself was *De la Louange et de la Gloire* (*Of Praise and Glory*): Mlle de Scudéry competed and won the prize, amid the great applause of all the old Academicians remaining over from the time of Richelieu. This Muse, who dashinglly carried off the first crown of victory, and who was to head the train of all future laureates, was sixty-four years of age at the time.

She continued to grow old and to survive, her renown, a real ruin to the outside world, but still enjoying fame in her chamber and behind closed doors. Her merit and estimable qualities attracted to the last a little court of admirers and friends, who never spoke of her but as *la première fille du monde* and the wonder of the Age of Louis-le-Grand. When she died, on the 2 June 1701, the *Journal des Savants* of the following month (11 July) recorded these pompous eulogies. About the same time, in the same quarter of the Marais, there was living and aging, nine years younger than she, a truly marvellous woman, who really had in her the grace, the light urbanity, the freshness and virility of mind, the gift of rejuvenation, all that Mlle de Scudéry lacked,—Ninon de L'Enclos. The mere connection of the two names is quite a lesson in taste.

Be that as it may, Mlle de Scudéry deserves that we should attach a correct idea to hers. Her novels gained a vogue which marks a precise date in the history of manners and the education of society. It will always be remembered that a volume of *Cyrus* was sent to the great Condé, when he was a prisoner at Vincennes, for his amusement, and a volume of *Clélie* to M. d'Andilly, a recluse at Port-Royal, to flatter him with the description of his desert. With the false imaginative pomp and the false historic pageantry with which she surrounds her thought, Mlle de Scudéry is after all hardly more absurd than was Mme Cottin forty years ago. That masquerade costume was borrowed: what was essential and proper to her was her manner of observing and painting the world around, of seizing in their passage the people of her acquaintance, of introducing them quite alive into her novels, and making them converse with wit and ingenuity. It is from this side too that I judge her, and, whilst admitting her to possess much distinction and ingenious sagacity in analysing, much moral anatomy, I may add that the whole is subtle, abstract, excessively dialectical and savouring of the thesis, without any lightness, without light, dry at bottom and disagreeable. It resembles and anticipates La Motte and Fontenelle, with much less freedom. She distinguishes, she divides and subdivides, she *classifies*, she teaches. Never any freshness; even the delicate quickly tends to be didactic and alembicated.

Even in the little rest pavilions, in the midst of the parks and the gardens she describes, she always takes care to place writing materials. Such appears to me, in spite of all my efforts to imagine her more amiable, the geographer of the *Pays de Tendre*, Pellisson's Sappho. If I were called upon therefore to conclude and to reply to the question which I set myself at the beginning, I should henceforth attach to the name of Mlle de Scudéry the idea, not of ridicule, but rather of esteem, of a very serious esteem, and by no means the idea of attraction or charm.

A woman of so much merit and no charm it is however an ungracious task to describe and painful to display; we should so much like to add the qualities that are lacking! But I was not loath to introduce into my collection one of this sort, that it might not be altogether smiling and altogether flattering.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since the above was written, M. Cousin has tried to work quite a revolution in honour of Mlle de Scudéry and in favour of the *Grand Cyrus*. With the aid of a printed key which was known to be in the Library of the Arsenal and another manuscript key which is in the Mazarin Library, he has endeavoured to give to that novel a serious historical value in so far as it is concerned with Condé's actions and great feats of arms. A writer of mediocre merit, who has gathered some accurate enough traditions and information on the persons of the seventeenth century, the Abbé Lambert, had said (*Histoire littéraire du Règne de Louis XIV*), speaking of the prodigious vogue that these novels of Mlle de Scudéry had in their time, and to explain this vogue: 'It is true that these novels, if we may call them by that name, should be regarded only as a species of epic poems and as true histories under hidden names. Such are *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus*, where we find a considerable part of the life of Louis of Bourbon, Prince of Condé, and her *Clélie* which contains a number of facts relating to all the most illustrious persons in France.' M. Cousin has been able to give new and piquant and very precise proofs of this assertion so far as it concerns *Le Grand Cyrus*; but he has gone a little too far in trying to make of Mlle de Scudéry an important military authority, and in ascribing to her an importance which she cannot lay claim to in such discussions. In this he has acted as he too frequently does when concluding: he is unduly emphatic, and exaggerates. The fact is that when once the Scythian and Persian personages are unmasked, and their real names restored with the help of keys, as M. Cousin has succeeded in doing without any trouble, but as nobody before him had the idea or the patience of doing to the same degree, it is ascertained that Mlle de Scudéry, who left no stone unturned and turned everything to account, had received from the Hôtel de Condé certain documents which, slightly disguised, she inserted at full length in her book the battle of Rocroy, the battle of Lens, the siege of Dunkirk under the name of the siege of Cumæ, are there described with all their particulars; she printed her notes and documents as she found them: that flattered the Condés, it spared her even the effort of invention, *et made copy* for the printer, a kind of consideration which one should never forget when speaking of Mlle de Scudéry. She never suspected that she would one day furnish arguments for the military discussions of the future Feuquières

and Jominis, and that she would become a staff authority. The fact remains that through her we have the version of Condé and his friends on those great deeds of arms, some points of which have formed the subject of controversy; it could not be otherwise. She is the faithful echo of the Hôtel de Condé in this matter, as in the matter of taste she was the echo of the Hôtel Rambouillet. M. Consin has recognised the bulletin which was only disguised. Those are certainly curious researches and ingenious observations whose only fault, in the present case, is that they are made to appear greater and more important in their results than they are, and which we should appreciate if they had only been given as something unexpected and piquant, and announced less triumphantly. For we must never forget the opinion of the people of taste of the time, people of the most delicate taste, on those works which we think to rehabilitate, and ask ourselves sometimes whether they would not smile at our excessive seriousness. Chapelle and Bachaumont, in their pleasing *Voyage*, treat us to a ridiculous conversation of the *Précieuses* of Montpellier, which is throughout the reverse of good sense and delicate fitness. Now, we read there: 'As to the novels, *Cassandre* was esteemed for the delicacy of the conversation; *Cyrus* and *Clélie* for the *magnificence* of the expression and the *grandeur* of the events.' Which is a warning to us not, after two centuries, to suddenly magnify the importance and celebrate the *grandeur* of the events, as they are found recorded in these two novels of society and the ruelle: the Shade of Chapelle would smile at us.

## ANDRÉ CHÉNIER AS POLITICIAN

*Monday, May 19, 1851.*

IN speaking the other day of Montaigne, and in presenting him in the midst of civil dissensions with all his philosophy, all his good sense and all his charm, I had no intention to offer a model, but only a portrait. To-day I should like to confront it with another portrait of a very different nature, and of a character no less enviable and dear to honest people. André Chénier will personify in himself another manner of being and of comporting himself in a time of revolution, a manner of feeling that is more active, more passionate, more devoted and more self-sacrificing, a manner less philosophical no doubt, but more heroic. Imagine not a Montaigne, but an Étienne de La Boétie living in '89 and '93, or even a Vauvenargues at this double date, and you will have André Chénier.

By nature, by instinct and vocation, he was anything but a politician : he loved before everything retreat, study, meditation, a society of intimate friends, a tender and amorous revery. Even his virile thoughts readily turned to solitary considerations, and were locked up, to mature, in slow writings. But if any public movement suddenly broke out and made the souls of men to vibrate, he took his part in it with ardour and exaltation ; but he loved immediately after to re-enter his studious paths, where he had his *bee-hive*, quite full, as he said, of a *poetic honey*. Thus he was for years, before the great tempest came and snatched him from his habitual thoughts and hurled him into the political arena. Isolated by inclination, with no ambition but that of Letters, of *sacred Letters*, as he calls them, aspiring to nothing so much as to see them renewed and reborn in the great springs, not despairing of contributing his share to them in an age whose life-



germs, whose corruption and decay too, he saw and appreciated, his intervention in politics was never any other but that of a generous private citizen who comes to fulfil his duty to the common cause, to say openly what he thinks, to give forcible utterance to his approval or his indignation. Do not expect of him any profound judgment or any direct revelations on the men and the characters on the scene : quite at the end and after his experience has ripened he may deliver some of his opinions on those characters ; but at first he only judges them by their part and acting as a whole, as a man might do from the first row of the pit. Or rather, to take a nobler comparison and one more in accordance with his character, André Chénier, with his hopes and desires, with his honest griefs, with his counsels and his anger even, might be compared to the leader of the chorus in the ancient tragedies. Unable to penetrate the secrets of the plot, he judges it so far as it is visible and reveals itself to him ; he approves or blames, he tries to keep it within the paths of morality and reason ; he gives himself and all honest people at least the satisfaction of expressing aloud his sincere feelings, and, at certain more violent moments, he is carried away, he advances and commits himself in the eyes of the principal persons, and draws upon himself their denouncement and vengeance, which takes effect a short time after. It is as if, in Sophocles' *Antigone*, a young man of the chorus should suddenly issue from the ranks, carried away by pity for the noble maiden, inveigh against the tyrant in the name of the victim, and be sent by Creon to die with her. *Antigone*, for André Chénier, was Justice, Country.

Born in 1763 at Constantinople, of a Greek mother, brought up from the beginning in France, under the beautiful sky of Languedoc, after the completion of his studies at the Collège de Navarre in Paris, he essayed for a time the military life ; but, soon disgusted by the examples and the idle life he witnessed in the garrison towns, he sought independence. Youth thinks it an easy matter to procure it. He enjoyed a few years devoted wholly to study, friendship, travels, poetry. *Hard necessity* however, as he calls it, obliged him to enter another career : he became attaché to a diplomatic embassy, and spent three whole years in London, three years

of ennui, of suffering and constraint. The Revolution of '89 found him in that position, and he was not long in escaping from it. André Chénier shared in many of the ideas of his century, its hopes and even its illusions. Not but that he criticised it both morally and from the literary point of view: 'As for me, he says, on opening my eyes around me after emerging from childhood, I saw that money and intrigue are almost the only paths to every kind of success; from that time I resolved therefore, without considering whether my circumstances permitted it, always to live aloof from all affairs, with my friends, in retreat and in the fullest freedom.' Like all those who bear the ideal within them, he was very quick to feel disgust and disdain. This early misanthropy did not hold out however against the great events and the promises of '89. The oath of the Tennis Court carried him away. He was only twenty-seven years of age, and for two years still, until 1792, we see him to a certain degree taking part in the movement, giving his advice on several occasions through the press, not convinced beforehand of their inefficacy; in a word, he is more of a citizen than a philosopher, and he defines himself at this moment as 'a man for whom there will be no happiness, unless he sees France free and wise; who sighs after the moment when all men will know the whole scope of their rights and duties; who grieves to see the truth supported as if it were a faction, the most lawful rights defended by unjust and violent means, and who would wish in short *that one could be right in a rational manner.*'

This first moment which shows us André Chénier still on the side of the moderates, but not yet on the side of resistance, is distinguished by a few writings, the most remarked of which was that which bears the title: *Avis aux Français sur leurs véritables Ennemis* (*Warning to the French against their true Enemies*), and which first appeared in the thirteenth number of the *Journal de la Société de 89*. It is signed with the author's name and bears the date Passy, 24 August 1790. André Chénier's honourable line of conduct is already fully outlined in it:

'When a great nation, he says at the beginning, after growing old in error and carelessness, weary at length of misfortunes and oppression, awakens out of its long lethargy, and, by a just and lawful insurrection, re-enters into all its rights and overthrows

the order of things which violated them all, it cannot in one moment find itself calmly settled in the new state which must succeed the old. The strong impetus given to so weighty a mass makes it totter for a time before it is able to find its balance.'

And he goes on to consider what are the means of making it regain this balance as soon as possible, and what are the hostile causes which oppose the most prompt establishment of a new order.

But we see very well at once, by the way in which he presents things and attacks his subject, that we are here neither with Mirabeau nor with Montaigne. At this date of 1790, and even as early as February of this year, Mirabeau, judging with his statesman's glance the seriousness of the situation and seeing the disturbances of every kind ready to break out in twenty parts of the kingdom, said forcibly: 'It still has the equilibrium of the great masses, but it has only that, and it is impossible to divine what will be the result of the commencing crisis.' Indeed, six months and even ten months before, Mirabeau judged matters to be very much more hazardous and perilous.—And the philosopher Montaigne, in his day, embracing with a glance those great radical revolutions which propose to make a clean slate and to rebuild everything anew, said:

'Nothing presses so hard upon a state as innovation: change only gives form to injustice and tyranny. When any piece is loosened, it may be proper to stay it; one may take care that the alteration and corruption natural to all things do not carry us too far from our beginnings and principles: but to undertake to found so great a mass anew, and to change the foundation of so vast a building, is for them to do, who to make clean, efface; who reform particular defects by a universal confusion, and cure diseases by death.'

André Chénier, with his more limited view wholly applied to present matters, goes on to denounce some of the most serious dangers, without perhaps foreseeing them to be as great as they are, and without yet despairing of everything. In the comparison that we should be tempted to establish between him and the two great minds previously cited, he will resume his advantages at least by the precision of his attack and by his bravery.

He shows at first how, on the morrow of a revolution and a change so universal, politics takes possession of all

minds, how every man thinks he can contribute to the public weal otherwise than by a *reasoned docility*, how every one attempts in his turn to *carry the banner*, and how a crowd of new-comers tax those with lukewarmness who, long before imbued and nourished with ideas of liberty, are already prepared for what may happen, and remain moderate and firm. He describes a crowd of unthinking, passionate men, obeying their fiery impulses, their party interests, at the word of order of their cunning leaders; scattering vague rumours or atrocious imputations; disturbing public opinion, harassing it in a *stagnant anarchy*, and molesting even the legislators in their work of *new political Establishments*. On all sides there are mutual accusations of conspiring and plotting, and nobody sees that there is a danger in the end 'lest our wavering uneasiness and our vague suspicions, he says, might throw us into one of those nocturnal combats in which friends and enemies are struck down indiscriminately.' It is this confusion of clamours and this big cloud of alarms that André Chénier especially has at heart to clear up and unravel. The true, the chief enemies of the Revolution, he asks himself, where are they?

The outside enemies he estimates at their right power, he neither underrates nor exaggerates them; so also, the émigrés. In any case, if there are enemies without, if there are also enemies within, we should unite to combat and vanquish them, and what is most opposed to this union, is that unfortunate propensity to suspicions, to tumult, to insurrections, which is fomented in France, and especially by a crowd of orators and writers: 'All the good and the evil that has been done in this Revolution is due to writings,' says André Chénier; and he boldly attacks the authors of the mischief, 'those men who are continually harassing the mind of the public, who make them waver between one vague opinion and another, between one excess and another, without giving them time to become fixed; who use up and exhaust the national enthusiasm against phantoms, so much so that if it comes to a real struggle it will perhaps have no strength left.' He becomes their declared accuser and commences against them his war to the death:

'As the majority of men, he says, have strong passions and a

*weak judgment*, and as at this tumultuous moment all passions are in movement, they all wish to be doing and know not what to do, which soon places them at the mercy of clever rascals: then the wise man follows them with his eyes; he sees whither they are tending; he observes their steps and their precepts; he ends perhaps by discovering the interests that animate them, and he declares them public enemies, if it is true that they preach a doctrine calculated to misguide the public spirit and to make it recede and deteriorate.'

And he tries to define the nature of *public spirit* in a country that is free and really worthy of being so:

'Is it not a certain general reason, a certain practical and as it were routine reason, nearly equally divided among all the citizens, and always in harmony and on a level with all the public institutions; by which every citizen knows very well what belongs to him, and consequently what belongs to others; by which every citizen knows very well what is due to society as a whole and adapts himself to it with all his power; by which every citizen respects his own person in others, and his rights in those of others? . . . And when society has endured so long that all this has become with everybody an *inborn habit* and a sort of *religion*, I might almost say a *superstition*, then certainly a country has the best public spirit possible.'

In '90 they were a long way from this ideal; are we much nearer to it now? In this *Avis aux Français* André Chénier endeavours to arouse the feelings that are capable of creating such a spirit. He tries to elevate the souls of men, to spur them to good things by the grandeur of the circumstances: 'France is at this moment not charged with its own interests alone; the cause of all Europe is laid in her hands. . . . We may say that the human race is now occupied in making a great experiment on our heads.' After the signal honour of success, he unfolds the incalculable consequences of a reverse. By every means, by every kind of reason, he urges an active and vigilant league of all honest and wise citizens, a courageous concord and almost a virtuous plot on their part to conjure the contrary efforts of folly and perversity. He points to the ever recurring and indefatigable efforts at subversion, and contrasts with them, in order to stimulate it, the lukewarmness of those honest men who, 'enemies of all that may look like violence, rely upon the goodness of their cause, expecting too much of their fellow-men, because they

know that, sooner or later, they will return to reason ; expecting too much of time, because they know that, sooner or later, it will do them justice ; lose favourable moments, allow their prudence to degenerate into timidity, become disheartened, compound with the future, and, wrapped up in their conscience, end by going to sleep in an inactive good will and a sort of lethargic innocence.' For his part, he will not do that : resolved as he was at first not to issue out of his obscurity, not to make his unknown voice heard in the midst of this confused clamour, he thought it his duty to overcome these reserves of self-esteem rather than modesty, and to pay, cost what it might, his tribute to the common weal :

' I have besides, he adds, tasted some joy in meriting the esteem of good men by offering myself to the hatred and the insults of this mass of corrupt mischief-makers whom I have unmasked. I have thought to serve liberty by avenging her of their praises. If, as I still hope, they succumb to the weight of reason, it will be honourable to have, if even to a small extent, contributed to their fall. If they triumph, they are people by whom it is better to be hanged than to be regarded as a friend.'

And here again we detect the fundamental feeling of inspiration in André Chénier during the whole Revolution. He will say again and again : ' It is beautiful, it is even *sweet* to be oppressed for virtue's sake.'

About two years after his *Avis aux Français*, denouncing in the *Journal de Paris* (29 March, 1792) the factious pomp and the sort of unworthy triumph decreed to the Swiss soldiers of the regiment of Châteaueux, he concludes with some words addressed to those who ask what is the good of writing so frequently against powerful and audacious parties, for one comes to grief and exposes oneself to their reprisals and invectives :

' I reply, he says, that indeed an immense multitude of men speak and decide in obedience to blind passions, and think they are in the position of judges, but that those who know this attach no value to their praises, and are not hurt by their insults.

' I add that it is good, that it is honourable, that it is *sweet*, to expose oneself, by uttering severe truths, to the hatred of those insolent despots who tyrannise over liberty in the name of liberty herself.

' When the all-powerful mischief-makers, drunk with avarice

and pride, fall destroyed by their own excesses, then their accomplices, their friends, their fellows, will tread them underfoot ; and the man of honour, though he will applaud their fall, will not mingle with the crowd that outrages them. But, until that time, even supposing that the example of a brave candour is of no use, *to unmask grasping and unjust factionists without any consideration, is a pleasure not unworthy of an honest man.*'

In short, it is the same sentiment that he puts into the mouth of Charlotte Corday, in the eloquent Ode which celebrates her :

Oh ! quel noble dédain fit sourire ta bouche,  
Quand un brigand, vengeur de ce brigand farouche,  
Crut te faire pâlir aux menaces de mort !

Thus André Chénier stands out before us, in his brief and valiant political career. What animates and guides him, is not the thought of a superior, ambitious and generous policy, which would attain to power and snatch it from the hands of unworthy adversaries. The feeling that throws him outside of himself and carries him forward, is above all a moral one : it is the hatred of the intelligent man for mischief-makers, of the man of intellect for folly, of the man of heart for cowardly manoeuvres and infamies ; it is the disdain of the passionate and contemptuous stoic against the rabble of those who go with the popular stream and who to-day will flatter the multitude as yesterday they would have fawned upon kings ; it is the irresistible expression of a noble satire which escapes him, which finds indignant and happy utterance, which gratifies itself *whatever the consequences may be*, though by finding a vent it should produce no other effect than that of relieving a generous bile. His inspiration here is still antique : it proceeds from that of Tacitus and of Horace's *just man* ; it recalls the virtuous accents of Juvenal and Persius, it suggests a poetic Cato, a lyric Alceste, who in case of need is able to arm himself with the iambic.

Pride and courage, pride and pleasure in finding himself apart, standing alone, exposed to the fury of the wicked, when the cowards and the dullards are silent, there is much of that in André Chénier's political inspiration.

That word *bronillon* (*mischief-maker*) perpetually returns to his lips to stigmatise his adversaries : it is the stigma imprinted by a just and strong mind on the kind of fault

which is most antipathetic to him and causes him most suffering.

André Chénier entered resolutely into polemics in the *Journal de Paris*, with an article published on the 12 February 1792 against the absurd and indecent Preface which Manuel had placed at the head of the *Letters of Mirabeau and Sophie*. It is the literary man and the man of taste who is angered in the first place and who vents his indignation at this unheard-of violation of reason and modesty in language. A lover of the antique sources, ever in quest of healthy and *good disciplines*, who would fain reproduce in his style the *modest and bold tranquillity* of his thoughts; who, in the beautiful prose pages where he outlines his plans of serious works, aspires and attains to a Latin conciseness, *to the nervous and succulent brevity* of an honest and virtuous Sallust, we can imagine the Despréaux-like, and more than Despréaux-like anger, which must have seized him at the sight of such an inundation of would-be philosophical declamations, of gallant facetiæ and licentious pleasantries, flowing from the pen of a bel-esprit formed in the school of Danton. Departing, in order to crush him more effectually, from the spurious *bon ton* which had never been his, and vindicating the true, eternal and natural *bon ton*, that of every well-born soul, which no revolution has the right to abolish: 'Every man who has a good and candid soul, he exclaimed, has in himself a justness of feeling and thoughts, a dignity of expression, an easy and seemly gaiety, a respect for the true proprieties, which is indeed the *bon ton*, since honesty can never have any other!'

Another of his indignations and angers, which involved him in his most serious controversy, and which finally caused his destruction through the mortal offence which he gave to Collot d'Herbois, is that which was aroused in him by the triumphal fête decreed (or tolerated) by the City of Paris, in honour of the Swiss of Châteauevieux. It must be recalled that these soldiers, after having mutinied at Nancy two years before and plundered the regimental cash-box, had been, to the number of forty or fifty, condemned to the galleys by the laws of federal justice in force among the Swiss troops. Not content with amnestying them in March 1792, it was intended to make heroes of them, and it was Collot d'Herbois who moved the



factionous motion to award them public honour. Just now it was the writer and the man of taste in Chénier that rose up in indignation against Manuel ; here, it is the soldier who is inflamed against Collet d'Herbois, it is the nobleman who has worn the sword and who knows what the religion of the flag means. He who would have been a worthy soldier of Xenophon's army, feels all his heroic consciousness rising up at the idea of this violation of discipline and honour exalted into a deed of heroism. One should read what he says of that *scandalous bacchanal*, that *ignominious puppet-show*, countenanced by the cowardice of the constituted Bodies and the never-dying inquisitiveness of the Parisians, and exclaiming, with an outburst worthy of an Ancient :

'It is said that the statues are to be veiled in all the public places through which this pomp will pass. And, without stopping to ask by what right private individuals who are giving a fête to their friends can presume to veil the public monuments, I will say that, if this miserable orgy really takes place, it is not the images of despots that should be covered with funeral crape, but the faces of all men of honour, of all Frenchmen who are submissive to the laws, and insulted by the success of soldiers who take up arms against the decrees and pillage their military cash-box. It is the duty of all the youth of the kingdom, of all the National Guards, to assume the colours of mourning, when the murder of their brothers is with us a title to fame for foreigners. It is the army that should have their eyes bandaged that they might not see the reward given to insubordination and mutiny. It is the National Assembly, the King, all the administrators, the whole Country that should wrap up their heads in order not to be the complaisant or silent witnesses of an outrage done to all the authorities and the whole Country. It is the Book of the Law that should be covered, when those who have torn its pages with musket-shots are receiving civic honours.'

'And turning to Pétion the Mayor who, in a Letter to his fellow-citizens, had replied with a *silly astuteness and a captious benignity* that this fête, if regarded for what it was, had no more than a private, *innocent and fraternal* character, and that the public spirit is elevated and fortified in the midst of *civic amusements*, André Chénier fixes him on the horns of a dilemma : 'In a country which witnesses such a fête, one of two things must be : either it is the

authorities who give it, or there are no authorities in that country.'

The same military feeling in André Chénier, already so nobly angered in the affair of the Swiss, is again aroused and finds vent in the finest accents, on the occasion of the assassination of General Dillon, massacred after a defeat by his own soldiers near Lille, in April 1792. André Chénier extracts from it matter for eloquent and really patriotic adjurations: 'O all you, whose soul is able to feel what is honest and good; all you who have a country, and who know what a native country is! . . . lift up your voices, show yourselves. . . . This moment is the only one that remains to us: it is the precise moment when we shall decide our future. . . . The loss of a position is a small thing, but the honour of France has been more compromised by detestable actions than it had ever been for centuries before.' He demands the vigorous, exemplary punishment of the guilty; he gives utterance to great truths: 'Remember that nothing is more humane, more lenient, more mild, than the strict inflexibility of just laws; that nothing is more cruel, more pitiless, than clemency for crime; that there is no other liberty than subjection to the laws.'

An essential character to be noted in these prose articles of André Chénier, is that if the poet shows himself in the elevation and the warmth of his feeling, by the disinterestedness of his thought and almost by an indifference to results, by a certain ardour of heroism and sacrifice, he does not lend any individual colour to his style. Metaphor is rarely seen. The language is noble, pure, firm, not very brilliant: it might even at times be more so, without appearing excessive. What strikes me is the reason and the energy of it: the idea of talent only follows later. Here and there we might be conscious of the eloquent and vehement breath of the orator rather than of the vein of the poet. André Chénier, faithful in this respect to antique taste, does not mingle prose and poetry.

One of the most important points of André Chénier's controversy is his denunciation of the Society of the Jacobins, in the article entitled: *De la Cause des Désordres qui troublent la France et arrêtent l'Établissement de la Liberté*, and published in the *Supplément au Journal de Paris* of the 26 February 1792. He shows that this Society, and

all those that are affiliated to it, those *Usurping Confraternities*, 'all join hands, forming a kind of electric chain round France'; that they form a *State within the State*; that 'the organisation of these Societies is the most complete system of social disorganisation that ever existed on this earth.' It was of this Society of the Jacobins that he was still thinking, when he said: 'Except in regard to talents and capacity they resemble the Society of the Jesuits.' He makes clear the profound distinction that exists between the true people, of which, according to him, the hard-working bourgeoisie forms the nucleus, and these Societies, 'in which an infinitely small number of Frenchmen appear to be a large number, because they are united and make a noise':

'A few hundred idlers gathered together in a garden or a theatre, or a few bands of robbers plundering the shops, are unblushingly called the *People*; and the most insolent despots have never received from the most covetous courtiers a viler and more fulsome flattery than the unclean adulation with which two or three thousand usurpers of the national sovereignty are every day intoxicated by the writers and orators of these Societies who are stirring up France.'

Aristotle and Burke had already remarked that the moral character of the demagogue who flatters the people and that of the courtier who flatters kings, are at bottom identically alike. The form of the majesty they flatter has alone changed: one of these kings has but one head, the other has five hundred thousand. The conduct of servility is in other respects the same. André Chénier remarked very wittily that on the stage the people, since they have been sovereign, are fawned upon just as openly as the king used to be fawned upon, at a time when the king was everything, and that the pit, representing the people in person, applaud and call for a repetition of all the adulatory maxims in their honour just as naively as Louis XIV used to hum Quinault's prologues in his praise, whilst they were putting on his shoes and his wig.

I will confine myself to indicating this controversy of André Chénier with the Jacobins, from which resulted a public and written dispute with his brother Marie-Joseph, at that time a member and a defender of that dangerous Society. Witnesses and partisans did their

very best to embitter this difference between the two brothers, which, by the way, never assumed the character that has been ascribed to it. Their quarrel lasted only a few months. When after the Tenth of August, André Chénier, having retired from the controversy in a delicate state of health, wished to go to Versailles to rest and recruit his health, it was Marie-Joseph himself who let him that little house where he wrote his last odes, so elevated and so pathetic.<sup>1</sup>

André Chénier, by the way, did not criticise Marie Joseph and his revolutionary tragedies with the severity that we might have expected from the moderate spirit of his doctrines a whole. He became a brother again and a little partial in that quarter. In a writing dated '91 and entitled *Réflexions sur l'Esprit de parti*, he shows himself unjust and really insulting to Burke, which may be partly explained by his desire to avenge his brother for what Burke had said about the tragedy *Charles IX* in his famous pamphlet.

In general, André Chénier's political attitude must be regarded as one of uprightness and courage, emanating from a simple and lofty personal inspiration. Attached to the Constitution of '91, judging it practicable in spite of its defects, thinking that the question would be solved if all honest people were to unite and lend their support to that law once promulgated, standing alone, attached to no party, to no sect, unacquainted even with his fellow-contributors on the *Journal de Paris*, in which he published his articles, confining himself to using that convenient means of the *Supplements*, which then allowed each to publish his reflexions *at his own expense*, he boldly replied to those who tried to establish a fellowship between him and the persons who wrote with him: 'There exists between us no association but that which arms a hundred villages against a band of robbers.' His political attitude, which is in some degree isolated and solitary, stands out clearly on the occasion of the hideous event of the 20 June.

<sup>1</sup> I have this fact from M. Gabriel de Chénier, the nephew of the two brothers. And on this occasion I may announce that M. de Chénier has finished an historical Précis on the life and works of his uncle André, compiled from the family papers, in which he has collected particulars as accurate as they are interesting. It is to be wished that the volume will be soon published.

By a generous and quite chivalric impulse, he declares himself more openly than ever for the King between the 20 June and the 10 August; he congratulates poor Louis XVI, so humiliated and so insulted, on his honourable attitude on the first of those occasions. With a feeling of delicacy he would like to send a word of comfort to his heart: 'May he read with some pleasure, he writes, these expressions of a respectful esteem from a man without any interests or desires, who has never written except at the bidding of his conscience; to whom the language of courtiers will be ever unknown; as passionately devoted as any man to real equality, but who would blush for himself if he refused a brilliant tribute to the virtuous actions by which a king endeavours to expiate the ills that so many other kings have done to humanity!' He imagines, he composes an Address from this same King to the Assembly, dated June 1792, in which he makes him speak with as much good sense as dignity. He ascribes to him a rôle that is impossible after the 20 June and when the game is already lost: he thinks that that day, which in reality marks the fall of the throne, might be the starting-point of an ideal Restoration of which he draws a chimerical and embellished picture. Here we find the poet again with his illusion. But no, it is still the man of heart and the valorous citizen who, careless of the result and braving the danger, cannot stifle the cry of his entrails. He imagines all who think with him to be as brave as himself: 'Let all those citizens whose opinions agree with those contained in this writing (and there is no doubt that this means almost the whole of France) at last break silence. This is not the time to be silent. . . . Let us altogether raise a loud cry of indignation and truth.'

It was this *loud cry* that was wanting, and that always will be wanting in a like circumstance, when matters have come to these extremes; for, as he himself remarks immediately after, 'the number of people who reflect and judge is infinitely small.' The *Parisian indolence* has been known from time immemorial; and if the ancient nations raised altars and temples to *Fear*, we may say (it is Chénier who is speaking in '92) that that divinity 'never had any more real altars than she has in Paris; that she was never honoured with a more universal worship.'

André Chénier's political attitude as a whole may there-

fore be very clearly defined as follows : It is not a concerted and consistent action, it is an individual protest, logical in form, lyrical in its source and inspiration, the protest of an honest man who defies those he refutes, and is not afraid of braving the sword.

The 10 August put an end to free discussion. André Chénier, retired from politics, took refuge in solitary indignation and silent contempt. In a letter of his, written on the 28 October 1792, he tells us how henceforth he is 'very determined to keep aloof in future, taking no active part in public affairs, applying himself more than ever, in his retreat, to a deep study of letters and ancient languages.' His health was impaired; from time to time he went to Versailles to spend a few weeks which he devoted to meditation, revery and poetry. A delicate love had revived in him and by its very pain comforted him for his other chagrins. The object of this love is celebrated, under the name of *Fanny*,<sup>1</sup> in a few adorable poems. But, in my opinion, the finest (if we must choose), the most complete of André Chénier's pieces is that which he composed about this time, beginning with this stanza :

O Versailles, ô bois, ô portiques !  
 Marbres vivants, berceaux antiques,  
 Par les dieux et les rois Élysée embelli,  
 A ton aspect dans ma pensée,  
 Comme sur l'herbe aride une fraîche rosée,  
 Coule un peu de calme et d'oubli.

One should read again the whole of the poem. In a rhythm as fresh as it is tuneful, it expresses the feeling for nature and solitude, a grand nature, cultivated and even pompous, all peopled with memories of august grandeur and mourning, and ennobled as it were or saddened by a majestic abandonment. In it we have the royal Elegy in all its glory, then, side by side with it, the mystery of a smiling and studious retreat *crowned with branches*, and favourable to the poet's dream, the dream of the lover. For he loves, he lives again, he hopes; he will sing as before, and the source of harmony will again overflow his heart and his lips. But suddenly there passes before

<sup>1</sup> It was (for time permits us to-day to lift the veil) Mme. Laurent Le Coultreux, née Pourrat, the sister of Mme Hocquard, who was then living at Luciennes.

his eyes the picture of the public horrors, and then the feeling of virtue and stoicism returns to dominate the poetic and tender feeling. The *just and magnanimous* man reawakens, and the sight of the massacred innocents poisons his happiness. Such is, in this admirable piece, the order and sequence of his ideas, each one of which by turns clothes itself in the most appropriate expression, in an expression at once bold, learned and naïve.

Lastly, to complete the picture of this noble figure of an honest and brave poet who, in the most horrible of modern revolutions, understood and practised courage and virtue in the antique sense of Thucydides and Aristotle, of Tacitus and Thræseas, we need only transcribe this testamentary page found among his papers, in which he lays himself bare before his conscience and before the future :

'He is weary of sharing the shame of this immense crowd who secretly abhor as much as he does, but who approve and encourage, at least by their silence, atrocious men and abominable actions. Life is not worth so much opprobrium. When the booths, the taverns and houses of debauchery vomit by the thousand legislators, magistrates and army generals who rise out of the mire for the good of their country, he has another ambition, and he does not think himself undeserving of his country, if some day he makes her say : This country, which at that time produced so many prodigies of imbecility and baseness, also produced a small number of men who renounced neither their reason nor their conscience ; witnessing the triumphs of vice, they remained friends of virtue and did not blush to be honourable men. In these times of violence they dared to speak of justice ; in these times of dementia, they dared to question ; in these times of the most abject hypocrisy, they did not feign to be wicked in order to buy their repose at the price of oppressed innocence ; they did not conceal their hatred from villains who, to reward their friends and punish their enemies, spared nothing, for it cost them nothing but crimes ; and a certain A. C. (*André Chénier*) was among those five or six whom neither the general frenzy, nor avidity, nor fear, could induce to bend the knee before crowned assassins, to touch hands stained by murders, and to sit down to a table where they drink human blood.'

Whatever political line a man may follow (and I do not pretend that that followed by André Chénier was strictly speaking the only and the true one), this manner of being

and feeling in a time of revolution, especially when it is finally confirmed and consecrated by death, will be ever reputed *morally* the most heroic and the most beautiful, the most worthy of all to be proposed to the respect of man.

To those who asked him what he had done during the Terror and the Convention, Sieyès was satisfied with replying: '*I lived.*' It will be ever more worthy and more beautiful to reply to this question, with the soul of André Chénier: '*And I incurred death!*'"

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I have long had in my possession (and I reproach myself with not having made use of it hitherto) a singular and hideous document which I owe to the friendship of M. Merruau, Secretary general of the Prefecture of the Seine; it is the official report of the arrest of André Chénier, his examination which is in the Archives of the city of Paris. I will give an exact copy of this document, with all its turpitudes of meaning and spelling, with all the marks of stupidity and barbarism. Disgrace of civilization! Behold into what hands that charming genius (like the whole of France) was fallen, behold the sort of men he had to deal with. The poet, in face of these brute beasts and these illiterate sans-culottes, had nobody whom he might address in the touching words of Phemius to Ulysses in the slaughter of the suitors: 'I embrace thy knees, O Ulysses; respect and have pity on me! It would be an eternal grief to thee if thou didst kill me, the bard who has songs for gods and men.'

#### EXAMINATION OF ANDRÉ CHÉNIER.

The eighteenth *vanlos* the second year of the French Republic one and indivisible <sup>1</sup>

In virtue of an order (*une ordre*) of the committee of general surety of the fourteenth *vanlose* which they presented to us on the seventeenth of the same year of which the *citoyen* Guenot is bearer of the said (*laditte*) order, after (*appress*) having requested the member of the committee revolution and of surveillance of the said commune of Passy near Paris having given us cognisance of the said order of which the above was bearers, we betook ourselves, house occupied by (*quaucupe*) the *citoyens* Piscatory where we found an individual (*particulier*) whom we asked (*avons mandé*) who (*quil*) he was and the subject (*suject*) that had brought him into this house<sup>2</sup> he showed us his card of the

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding to the 8 March 1794.

<sup>2</sup> André Chénier was arrested on a visit to M. Piscatory, brother-in-law of M. Pastoret, at Passy; he there met the Commissaire and his acolytes, who were making a domiciliary visit, and took upon themselves to secure his person, without any warrant and as a measure of precaution.



Brutus section saying that he was returning (*retournaist*) to paris (*apparais*), and that he was *Good citoyen* and that it was the first time (*joy*) that he came into that house, that he was accompanied (*a compaignier*) by a *citoyen* of Versaille whence he was to conduct her to the said Versaille after (*apprest*) having taken a carriage at the coach office (*au bureaux du cauche*) he made us this declaration at a quarter to ten in the evening at the gate of the bois de Boulogne opposite the erstwhile *chateaux* of Lamuette and after having asked him about his goings not having positively replied to us we decided that he should be in arrest in the said house until (*jusqua que*) the said order which was communicated (*communiqué*) to us by the *citoyen* Guenot was carried out but not finding the person named in the said order, we have kept him until this day eighteenth. And after the reply of the *citoyen* Pastourel and Piscatory we presumed that the *citoyen* ought to be questioned (*interrogés*) and after his examination conducted to paris to be there detained as a measure of general surety (*sureté*) and immediately (*de suite*) we summoned the *citoyen* Chénier to tell us his name and surname (*cest nomd et surnomd*) age (*ages*) and place (*payé*) of birth domicile quality and means of subsistence (*subsstité*).

#### INTERROGATORY.

Asked him (*A lui demandé*) his name (*comment il sapelloit*)

Replied (*A répondu*) that his name was André Chénier, native of Constantinoble thirty-one years of age residing at Paris rue de Clair section of Brutus

Asked him since when (*de quelle ané*) he lived in the rue de Clair

Replied since about seventeen hundred and ninety-two at least

Asked him what are his means of subsistence (*quel son ses moyent de subsisté*)

Replied that since ninety that he lives on the allowance that his father makes him (*qu'il vie que de que lui fait son père*, i.e., *qu'il ne vit que de ce que lui fait son père*)

Asked him what allowance his father made him

Replied that his father gave him some when he asked him for some

Asked him if he can tell us what is the amount of the yearly sum that he asks of his father

Replied that he did not know positively but about eight hundred to a thousand *livre* a year

Asked if he has nothing else but the sum declared above

Replied that he has no other means than those declared

Asked him what manner he takes his existence

Replied now (*tenteau*) at his father's now (*tenteau*) at his friends' now (*tentof*) at restaurants (*restaurateurs*)

Asked who are his friends where he ordinarily goes to eat (*mangé*)

Replied that he went to several friends whose names he does not think it necessary to tell

Asked if he often comes to eat in the house where we arrested him

Replied that he did not think that he had *never* eaten in the house where he was arrested, but he said that he had sometimes eaten with the same persons at their house at paris (*apparis*)

Asked if he has no correspondence with the enemies of the Republic and charged him to tell the truth

Replied none (*au cune*)

Asked if he has not received letters from england (*dangladaire*) since his return to the Republic

Replied that he has received one or two from *citoyen* Barthelemy then minister plenipotentiary in England and that he has not received any other

Asked him at what epoch he received the letters designated above called upon him to produce them (*les représentés*)

Replied that he did not have them

Asked what he has done with them and the motive which induced him to get rid of them (*sendeffaire*)

Replied that they were only letters relative to his private interests, as to send his books and other effects left in England and of the kind of those that nobody keeps

Asked what sort of kind that nobody keeps and especially letters bearing his personal interest <sup>1</sup> charged him to tell us the truth

Replied it seems to me that letters which announce (*énonce*) the arrival of the above mentioned effects when his effects are received are no longer of any value

Represented to him that he is not telling the truth, the more so because personal letters should be kept for the justification of him who sent (*à En voyé*) the effects as well as of him who has received them

Replied that he persists in believing (*qu'il persève à pensé*) when private persons who are not so methodical as houses of business when the reception of the effects (*font*) demanded is acknowledged all the correspondence becomes useless and that he believes that most private persons act thus (*insy*)

Represented to him that we are not asking him about business charged him to answer us on the motives of his arrest which are not a matter of business <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> They cannot believe him when he says he has not kept letters relating to personal interests. It is evident that their ideas on the subject are those of tradesmen, retailers, small shopkeepers, and they think this gentleman is trying to shuffle. To their little minds not to keep a letter that announces the arrival of *effects* is suspicious.

<sup>2</sup> The fellow is apparently angry at these allusions to tradesmen, and takes them as a personal reflexion.

Replied that he did not know (*qu'il en ignorest du fait*)

Asked why he tries to put us off and on what he answers categorically (i.e., charged him to answer categorically)

Said he had replied with all possible simplicity and that his reply contains the exact truth

Asked if he has long known the citizens where we arrested him charged him to tell us since when

Replied that he had known them four or five years

Asked how he had made their acquaintance

Replied that he first made their acquaintance at the house of the *citoyens* Trudenne

Asked in what street she was then living

Replied in the place de la Revolution the house à Cottée (i.e. à côté, next door)

Asked how he knows the house à Cottée<sup>1</sup> and the citizens who lived there at that time

Replied that he has been their friend since childhood

Represented to him that he is not correct in his reply seeing that there is no house in the place de la Revolution that is called the house à Cottée of which he has just declared

Replied that he meant the house next (*voisine*) to the *citoyen* Leterns

Represented to him that he is putting us off with words seeing that he twice repeated the house à Cottée

Replied that he has spoken the truth

Asked if he is alone in the apartment which he occupies in the rue de Clairv number ninety-seven

Replied that he lived with his father and his mother and his elder brother

Asked if he has nobody for the service

There is a common domestic for the four who serves (*serve*) them

Asked where he was at the epoch of the tenth august one thousand seven hundred and ninety-two

Replied that he was at paris sick of a nephritic colic

Asked if he is continually afflicted with this colic and if he was afflicted with it the day of the tenth august ninety-two

Replied that he was then recovering from an attack and that he has been almost continually afflicted with this malady since the age of twenty years more or less violent

Asked what is this malady and what surgeon treated him at that time and if it is the same who is treating him still

Replied that the physician Joffroy treated him at the beginning of the malady and since that time I have followed a course of treatment known for that kind of ills

<sup>1</sup> By a queer misunderstanding the examining commissaire understands him to mean the house belonging to a person of the name of Cottée, instead of the house next door (*à côté*) and gets angry at his own stupidity; the purveyors of the scaffold were not remarkable for their intelligence.

Asked what difference he makes between an attack of ills or of maladies

Replied that he understood by attack when the ill is a little more violent and prevents action (*enpeche d'agir*)

Asked at what epoch he took the physician he has just spoken of and at what epoch he left (him) charged to give us certificates

Replied that his family will certify that he was always the family physician

Asked if he went on duty on the tenth of august one thousand seven hundred and ninety-two

Replied that he went on duty when his health permitted

Asked if on the tenth of august ninety-two when he heard the general call to arms if he took up arms to hasten (*vollaïre*) to the succour of his fellow-citizens and to save his country

Replied no that he was still too weak

Asked what was the motive that prevented him

Replied the feebleness of his health at the time

Asked to give us proofs of it by certificates signed by the surgeon and by the section seeing that he is not correct in his reply

Replied that he has none (*qu'il n'a nient point*)

Asked what he means by those words, etc. (*que veux dire c'est a nous est comme<sup>1</sup> qu'il n'en a point*)

Replied that he has no certificate above announced

Represented to him that he is a bad citizen not to have hastened to the defence of his country seeing that the lame and the infirm took up arms and united on the place with all the good citizens to defend it against the courtiers of the cidevant Capet and royalist

Replied that he had not sufficient physical strength to do so

Asked if at that epoch his brothers and his father obeyed the call with the citizens of their section to the defensive places against the tyrant of the Republic charged to tell us the truth

Replied that his father was old and employed in his section and that his brother was vice-consul in Spain the others not living in the house he did not know (*il y gnoroit*) where they were (*ou ils étoient*)

Asked where was the domestic who served them where was he on the tenth of august

Replied that he did not know

Represented to him that at the epoch of that day that all the good citizens were not ignorant of their existences and that having heard the general beat that was a motive the more to recognise all the good citizens and the motive to which he had employed himself so save the Republic

Replied that he had said the exact truth

Asked what was the exact truth

<sup>1</sup> The meaning of the words *a nous est comme* is obscure.

Replied that it was all that was above (*que c'étoit toutes ce  
qui étoit cy dessus*)

And after having read the official report (*procest verbale*  
and we have closed (*cleau*) and signed it and the citoyen Chenier  
declared that he would not sign (*signée*)

Signed : GENNOT, CRAMOISIN, BOUDGOUST,  
DUCHESNE Comisaire

—— And now, to relieve our hearts big with disgust, let us  
read again the poet's last Iambics !

## SAINT-ÉVREMOND AND NINON

*Monday, May 26, 1851.*

THERE could be no better introduction to Ninon than through Saint-Evremond. He is an amiable sage, a mind of the first quality for good sense, a mind which can enter into all the graces. His natural character is that of an easy-going superiority ; I cannot better define him than as a kind of mitigated Montaigne. His mind is distinguished both by strength and delicacy ; his soul is never put out of itself or its balance, as he says. He has felt the passions, he has allowed them to arise, and to a certain point he has cultivated them in himself, but has never blindly yielded to them ; and, even when he yielded to them, he brought to them discretion and moderation. In his youth he was, like all the flower of the Court, in Ninon's retinue, her lover a little, and very much her friend ; he occasionally corresponded with her during his long disgrace : the small number of authentic letters that we have of Ninon are written to Saint-Evremond, and they give us a very good idea of her intellectual side, the only one by which she deserved to survive.

Saint-Evremond would require a separate Study ; to-day we only desire of him the favour of being introduced to the intimacy of the woman who, during so long a life, renewed the charm so often, and whose mind improved to the last.

Saint-Evremond, born in 1613, was three years older than Ninon, who was born in 1616 ; he died in 1703, at more than ninety years of age, and she in 1705, at the same age minus a few months. Saint-Evremond's life is divided into two very distinct halves. Until he was forty-eight he lived in France, at Court, in the army, a brilliant and active life ; esteemed by the greatest generals, he was in a good way to attain a high military for-

tune. A long Letter written by him, very witty and very malicious, on the Treaty of the Pyrenees and against Cardinal Mazarin, discovered among the papers of Mme Duplessis-Bellière at the time of Fouquet's arrest, angered Louis XIV, who ordered the author of it to be put into the Bastille. Warned in time, Saint-Evremond left France, took refuge in Holland, then in England, and lived forty-two years longer the life of a curioso and a philosopher, much appreciated, much sought after in the highest society, seeing what was best in foreign countries, and bearing his disgrace with a real pride and an apparent nonchalance. What greatly contributed to lighten his banishment was the arrival soon after in England of the beautiful Duchesse de Mazarin, the niece of the man who was the primary cause of his misfortune : he became attached to her and loved her for her intellect, for her solid qualities, as much as for her beauty. All the Cardinal's nieces had a singular gift of attraction and a sort of magic spell : 'The source of charms is in the Mazarin blood,' said Ninon. The Duchesse de Mazarin was an essential part of Saint-Evremond's life, and more essential than Ninon herself.

Saint-Evremond's greatest pleasure, that for which he had the greatest relish from his youth up, in the age of passions, and which became ever more dear to him as he grew old, was conversation : 'Greatly as I enjoy the pleasure of reading, he said, I shall ever be most sensible to that of conversation. Female intercourse<sup>sc</sup> would provide me with the greatest pleasure, if the charm we find in the sight of amiable women did not leave behind it the pains of resisting love.' And he shows of what kind and in what spirit should be one's ordinary converse with women, if one wishes to please them :

'The first merit with ladies, is to love ; the second, is to enter into the confidence of their inclinations ; the third, to bring out ingeniously all their amiable qualities. If nothing leads us to the secret of the heart, we must at least win their mind by praise ; for, in default of lovers to whom everything yields, he pleases best who offers them the best means of pleasing themselves.'

The precepts he gives for pleasing them and interesting them in conversation, are the most consummate result of experience :

'In conversing with them, remember never to keep them in a state of indifference; their soul is hostile to such languor; either make them love you, or flatter them on the object of their love, or make them discover qualities in themselves which will make them more in love with themselves; for, after all, love is necessary to them, of whatever nature it may be; their heart is never void of that passion.'

If that is the ordinary condition of women, even intellectual women, the merit is the greater in those who are able to free themselves from the habitual impulse of their sex, without losing anything in respect of charm. Saint-Evremond had met some of these rare women, and we may guess whom he was thinking of when he wrote:

'We do meet with some, in truth, who can harbour esteem and affection, even without love; we do meet with some who are as capable of secrecy and confidence as the most faithful of our friends. I know some who have no less wit and discretion than charm and beauty; but they are singularities whom nature, designedly or through caprice, is sometimes pleased to give us. . . . These extraordinary women seem to have borrowed the merit of men, and perhaps they commit a sort of infidelity to their sex, in passing thus from their natural condition to the true advantages of ours.'

In an ideal Portrait which he drew of *the Woman who is not to be found and who will never be found*, and in which he took a pleasure in collecting in the person of a certain *Émilie* of his invention all the qualities most difficult to associate and all the contraries:

'There you have the Portrait, he says in conclusion, of *the Woman who is not to be found*, if one may draw the portrait of a thing that does not exist. It is rather the idea of a *perfect person*. I have not tried to seek it among *men*, because in their intercourse there is always lacking some indescribable charm that we find in that of *women*; and I thought it less impossible to find in a woman the strongest and soundest reason of men, than in a man the charms and pleasing qualities natural to women.'

This sound reason, this sensible mind, mingled with sprightliness and charm, he had found in Ninon, and this corner of the Portrait of *Émilie* was by no means a purely imaginary idea.



Let us then see what she was, this so celebrated Ninon and let us look at her from the side by which she takes her true place in the history of Letters and of French society. Let us see her,—profane that I am, I was about to say, let us study her, exercising the kind of influence which corrected the tone of the Hôtel Rambouillet and the *Précieuses*, and seconded the judicious action of Mme de La Fayette.

I have sometimes heard the question asked why I was so fond of concerning myself with the amiable and witty women of the past, and placing them in their proper light. Without mentioning the disinterested pleasure of living again in imagination for a time in that select company, I will reply with a word of Goethe, the great critic of our age; speaking of Mme de Tencin, he says: 'Her history and that of the celebrated women who presided over the principal societies of Paris in the eighteenth century, such as Mme Geoffrin, Mme Du Deffand, Mlle de Lespinasse, etc., would form an interesting study; we might derive from it some useful details bearing on the knowledge either of the French character and mind in particular, or even of the human mind in general, for these particulars would be associated with times that are equally honourable to both.' I am trying, according to my capacity, to carry out a part of Goethe's program, and if he said that of the eighteenth century, I can say it with stronger reason of the seventeenth, in which there was, among the celebrated women who influenced it, still more inventiveness and personal originality. In the matter of polite society and conversation, the eighteenth century had but to extend, to regulate and perfect what the seventeenth had primarily founded and established.

Before she became the almost venerable personage she was towards the end of her life, Ninon had had one or two anterior epochs which I will only touch upon. Mlle Anne de L'Enclos (for *Ninon* is only a gallant pet-name), born in Paris on the 15 May 1616, of a father who was a nobleman, a great dueller, a cavalier, a free-thinker, a musician and a man of pleasure, and of a correct and strict mother, found herself an orphan at the age of fifteen, and greatly disposed to enjoy her liberty with a boldness seasoned with wit and tempered with good taste, which was to recall the existence of the *hetairai* of Greece. There

was at this period in France a school of epicureanism and scepticism which was represented in science by Gassendi and La Mothe Le Vayer ; in Letters and society by Des Yveteaux, Des Barreaux, and many others. Montaigne and Charron were then the authors in fashion, and their spirit aided this freedom of opinion. Ninon was among the first to emancipate herself as a woman, to profess that there is at bottom only one morality for men and women ; that by reducing, as the world does, all the virtues of the other sex to one single virtue, we depreciate the sex, and do them wrong and injury ; that we seem to exclude them in a mass from the exercise of probity, that more masculine and more general virtue, which comprehends all the others ; that this probity is compatible in a woman even with the infraction of what we are accustomed by convention to regard as the only virtue. 'The virtue of woman is the finest invention of man,' that singular mot, which we owe to a witty muse of our time, appears to have been filched from Ninon. We get a good idea of that whole code of morality, which is much less new to-day, and which has even become a rather vulgar common-place. In Ninon's time it was still only an audacity, a quite individual exception, a bold wager that she made it her duty to sustain, whilst abandoning herself to the inconstancy and variety of her inclinations. What did she do, or rather what did she not do then ? What licence did she not indulge in her mad humour ? What whim did she ever refuse herself ? The list of her conquests is found everywhere, and, however long we may make it, it will still be very incomplete. This Ninon, the rival and heiress of Marion Delorme, shall not detain us. We refer the curious to history, to legend, to all the things that have been said, repeated and embroidered upon the theme. 'If this fashion continues, said Voltaire, there will soon be as many Histories of Ninon as there are of Louis XIV.' Tallemant des Réaux, since then, has given us the quite plain chronicle and very circumstantial details. In the first and fourth volumes of his excellent *Mémoires sur Madame de Sévigné*, M. Walckenaer has drawn up what we might call *Ninon's Chronology*. The succession of her lovers has formed the subject of discussions and corrections almost as precise as those of the Assyrian and Egyptian kings. What is

certain is that in the midst of this licence, in which the passions had so great a share, she imposed some limits upon herself and governed her conduct to a certain extent. Her reason gave proofs of solidity in her judgments; her maddest sallies often concealed great good sense. She practised reflexion in an age and a course of life in which others are hardly capable of any thought, and she, who remained so long young in intellect, was at the same time prematurely mature.

There were moments however when this capricious and violent existence was within an ace of running upon the rock where her likes ordinarily come to grief, and where the cleverest would not have survived. There was a moment, under the Regency, when Ninon's levity, further excited by that of the time, passed all bounds and was on the point of leading to a scandal. On those days it needs only a pretext and an accident for society, for public and general morality, defied in its principles and most respectable prejudices, to rise up in the end and indulge in reprisals, often brutal, but in part merited. The Queen-Regent was strongly urged at the time to take severe measures against the sinner. In this conjuncture the Prince de Condé, once her lover and still her friend, personally intervened on Ninon's behalf, by giving public testimony, at Court and elsewhere, of his interest in her. Meeting her one day in her carriage, he stopped his own, dismounted, and with his hat in his hand saluted her in presence of the astonished crowd. Such marks of consideration were still of sovereign effect. It was rumoured at this time that Ninon was to depart for Cayenne, whither a large number emigrated from all classes. We may believe that that was only a pretence on her part, to conjure the anger of her enemies and give her friends the signal to defend her. She did not depart; she continued the same life, though she slightly lowered the tone of it. From the Marais where she first lived, she had gone to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where it seems that she spent the period of her greatest licence. She returned to her quarters in the Marais, and there, surrounded by friends, living in her own way, but warned by the appearances and by the reigning influence of Louis XIV, she became steadier, she restricted herself little by little to the truly honourable condition in which we see her at

the end of her life, and which made it possible for the austere Saint-Simon to say:

'Ninon had illustrious friends of all sorts, and had so much wit that she kept them all, and kept them in harmony together, or at least without the least disturbance. Everything went off in her house with a respect and an external decency which the highest princesses rarely keep up with their frailties. Hence she had for friends all the most sorted and the most exalted at Court, so that it became the fashion to be received at her house, and it was a rightly desired privilege on account of the intimacies which were there formed. Never any gambling, nor loud laughter, nor disputes, nor talk of religion or government; much wit and very embellished, ancient and modern news, news of gallantries, and yet without opening the door to calumny; all was there delicate, light, measured, and formed conversations which she was able to sustain by her wit, and by all the facts she knew of every age. The consideration, strange to say! which she had acquired, the number and distinction of her friends and acquaintances, continued to attract the world to her when her charms had ceased, and when propriety and fashion forbid her any longer to mingle the body with the mind. . . . Her conversation was charming. Disinterested, faithful, discreet and reliable to the last degree; and, excepting her frailty, we might say that she was virtuous and full of probity. . . . All this brought her reputation, and a quite singular consideration.'

To adopt a comparison that is not disproportioned, and which is naturally suggested by this word probity, so often employed in her connection, we may say that, in spite of her gallant intrigues, Ninon preserved some of that frankness and that uprightness which the Princess Palatine contrived to observe in the midst of the political factions during the Fronde.

Tallemant has a remarkable saying on Ninon, which is *that she never had much beauty*, she had above all charm. Somaize, in the *Grand Dictionnaire des Précieuses*, says the same thing: 'As to beauty, although we are sufficiently informed that she has enough of it to inspire love, we must however confess that *her mind is more charming than her face*, and that many would escape her fetters if they saw her only.' But, as soon as she spoke, all were captivated and enraptured: it was the mind that put the finishing touch to her beauty and gave her all her expression and her power. So in music, when she played the lute, she preferred a touching expression to the most

learned execution : 'Sensibility, she said, is the soul of song.'

There are so many Portraits of Ninon, that I will confine myself to one, which shows her in her youth, under her most favourable and most decorous light. It is by Mlle de Scudéry, who, in her novel *Clélie*, is supposed to have painted Ninon in the person of *Clarice*. The resemblance in respect of several essential features makes me believe that that is the true key to this little known Portrait :

'The amiable *Clarice* is, without doubt, one of the most charming persons in the world, whose mind and humour have a quite particular character; but, before I begin to depict her, I must tell you something of her beauty. *Clarice* is then of a very fine figure and an agreeable height, capable of pleasing all the world by a certain free and natural air which gives her a good grace. Her hair is of the most beautiful chestnut ever seen, and she has a round face, a bright complexion, an agreeable mouth, very red lips, a little dimple on her chin, which is very becoming to her, bright black eyes, full of fire, smiling, a refined, animated and very intelligent expression. . . . As for wit, *Clarice* has without doubt much of it, and her wit is of a certain kind that you seldom meet with in other persons, for it is sprightly, amusing, and adapted to all sorts of people, principally to people of the world. She speaks much, she laughs readily, she can be greatly amused by a trifle, and she loves to wage an innocent warfare against her friends. . . . But, with all her disposition to be merry, we may say that this amiable person has all the good qualities of the melancholy when their mind is sound, for she has a tender and susceptible heart, she can weep with her friends in affliction; she can break with pleasures when friendship demands it; she is faithful to her friends; she is capable of secrecy and discretion; she never quarrels with anybody; she is generous and constant in her feelings, and she is in short so amiable that she is loved by the most honourable persons at Court, of both sexes, but by people who are alike neither in condition, nor in humour, nor in intellect, nor in interests, and who yet all agree that *Clarice* is very charming, that she has wit, true goodness and a thousand qualities worthy of being infinitely esteemed.'

There you have a Ninon in her youth, such as she might appear in friendship and on the days when she traversed the society of the *Précieuses*, she who was so little of a *Précieuse*, and who, in conversation with Queen Christina, defined them so well in a few words : '*The Précieuses are the Jansenists of love.*' But, with a wit as versatile as it was unique, she could adapt herself to all, and she

found grace, when she needed it, and favour before the Hôtel Rambouillet, just as, on the days when he consulted her on *Tartufe*, she paid Molière back in his own coin.

Ninon's Portrait according to Mlle de Scudéry would give us however a too weak and diluted idea of her: she had very much more verve, more high spirits and piquancy. Joy was the groundwork of her soul and the expression as it were of the health of her mind; it was she who wrote to Saint-Evremond: 'The joy of the mind shows its strength.' It was said of her that at table, so cheerful and animated was she, that 'she was *intoxicated with the soup*'; drunk with good humour and sallies, for she drank nothing but water, and a drinker, whether his name was Chapelle or Vendôme, was never welcome with her. It was one of her maxims 'that, in life, one should lay in provisions of food only and never of pleasures; that we should always take them day by day; and that wrinkles would be much more in place on the heel than on the face.' She had a keen sense of the ridiculous, and could take off people with a single touch and a single metaphor. She said of Mme de Choiseul, whose head-dress was a caricature: 'She is as like a *tavern signboard* as two drops of water.' She said of the poor little Chevalier de Sévigné, who, between her and the actress Champmeslé, had pledged himself beyond his powers: 'He is a regular pumpkin fricasseed in snow.' Her merry mot: '*Oh! le bon billet qu'a La Châtre!*' is become a proverbial saying. To the Comte de Choiseul, who annoyed her a little, and who, one day when he had received promotion, was admiring himself and all his orders in the glass, she said before the whole company: 'Take care, Monsieur le Comte; if I catch you again I will tell who were your comrades.' There had been indeed a deplorable selection of candidates for honours.—In her young days she had a serious illness, and was given up; all around her were weeping and wishing to follow her example and die; she rallied all these young people, and comforted them at the same time: 'Bah! she said, I am leaving nothing but dying people behind me.' Her repartees were quick and irresistible; they were light, pointed, piquant. She never quoted for the sake of quoting, but the words she needed always occurred to her at the right moment and fitted the occasion in a novel way: there was imagination even in

her memory. There was always some in her stories : *what we call tales in the mouth of others became in hers perfect dramatic scenes*, which for the resemblance of characters and for expression, lacked nothing.

By all these amiable and brilliant qualities, founded upon a solid and reliable capacity for friendship, she won the sympathies of all who saw her, she made some forget that she was growing old, and others that she had once been very young without ceasing to be so. La Fare, the voluptuous Epicure, said of her : ' I did not see this Ninon in the days of her beauty ; but, at the age of fifty and even after she was sixty, she had lovers who were very fond of her, and the most honourable men in France for her friends. Until ninety, she was still sought after by the best society of her time. She died with all her reason, and even with all the charm of her wit, which was the best and the most amiable that I have known in any woman.' And Mme de Maintenon, who was very intimate in her youth with Ninon, but who already had a foothold at Court and enjoyed the highest favour, wrote to her, recommending her brother (Versailles, November 1679) : ' Continue, Mademoiselle, to give M. d'Aubigné good advice ; he has need of some lessons from *Leontium*.<sup>1</sup> The warnings of an amiable lady-friend are always more persuasive than those of a severe sister.'

Ninon's Letters, which are simple and original in expression, and in their tone resemble her conversation, are very few in number : I only know of a dozen or so that are authentic, and they are written to Saint-Evremond. It appears that, when he escaped from France in 1661, she owed him a hundred pistoles. Eight years later she still owed them. Saint-Evremond, then in Holland (1669), appears to be annoyed at the delay : ' She is very honest (he writes to one M. d'Hervart whom he had seen at The Hague and who was back in Paris), but I have been absent a long while, and, after eight years, nothing is so easy as not to remember people, when a recollection costs a hundred pistoles. Perhaps I am wrong in suspecting her to be capable of human weakness.' He was indeed wrong. Ninon had proved herself when, after years, she returned to Gourville that famous cash-box which he had left in

<sup>1</sup> *Leontium*, a friend and disciple of Epicurus : Ninon's philosophic sobriquet.

trust with her, and which she refused to communicate to more than one lover and successor of Gourville, who would have been glad enough to be his heir in every way. At the first reminder of her debt, she sent word to Saint-Evremond that he could have fifty pistoles whenever he wanted them. Fifty pistoles instead of a hundred was not quite good enough for the banished philosopher; he thought that was treating him a little too much like a lover, that is to say, with a half-fidelity, and not enough as a friend. He indulged in a pleasantry to that effect which was not very well received. There had in fact been a misunderstanding, and Ninon had promised to pay the remainder of the sum on a certain date. Before the term agreed upon, she settled the whole account, and prided herself on being more punctilious even than Marcus Aurelius, an emperor and a philosopher, but who did not pay his creditors before he was obliged: 'That raises one's courage a little, she replied to Saint-Evremond; and when you have thought over the matter, you will see that you should not jest with an irreproachable banker. . . . I told you that my charms were changed into solid and serious qualities, and you know that it is not permitted to jest with a personage.'

It was just the time when Ninon, ceasing to be the Ninon of the Fronde, of the Regency and of her first period of levity, became Mlle de L'Enclos and passed into the *personage* which she perfected more and more and sustained till the end of her life.

Saint-Evremond, who found himself in the wrong and a little ashamed no doubt of his misplaced raillery, shows himself eager to make amends and writes Ninon a letter in which he praises her as she deserves, and represents her to the life in that moment of transition and metamorphosis. I will quote a portion of this little-known letter, which is not found in the Works of Saint-Evremond:<sup>1</sup>

'With all respect to that old dreamer (*Solon*) who held that nobody was happy before his death, I consider you, he writes to her, in full life as you are, the happiest creature that ever was. You have been loved by the most honourable men in the world, and have loved often enough to leave nothing untasted in

<sup>1</sup> It is to be found in *Le Conservateur ou Collection de morceaux rares*, April 1738.



pleasures, and as wisely as it was needful to anticipate the dis- gusts of a languishing passion. None ever carried the happiness of your sex so far : there are few princesses in the world to whom their condition would not appear a hard one, from jealousy of yours ; there are no saints in the convents who would not be willing to change the tranquillity of their mind for the agreeable agitations of your heart. Of all torments you have never felt any but those of love, and you know better than any- body that in love

Tous les a tres plaisirs ne valent pas ses peines.

Now that the flower of your great youth is past (the words are rude, but you have written it so often, that I am only re-echoing you), your face has still such a good expression and your mind so much charm, that, were it not for the delicacy of your choice in receiving the world, there would be as great a crowd in your house, without any self-interest, as there is at Court where the greatest fortune is to be won. You mingle even the virtues with all your charms, and, at the moment when a lover discloses his passion to you, a friend can entrust to you his secret. Your word is the surest agreement that one can rely upon. . . .

The Correspondence of Ninon with Saint-Evremond, through the divers events and wars, was not very regular nor very sustained, and the few letters which are preserved belong to the last years of their life. When we find them again writing to one another, they are decidedly old, very old both of them, and their greatest pleasure is to speak with regret of the past or to jest pleasantly at old age. Ninon regrets her friend and would like him to be at her side : ' I should have liked to spend the remainder of my life with you : If you had thought as I do, you would be here.' At that time indeed Saint-Evremond could have returned to his country if he had pleased. She says jestingly however that it is finer and more meritorious to remember the absent so well after so many years : ' And it was perhaps to adorn my epitaph that this separation of the body came about.' Saint-Evremond had recommended to Ninon a certain M. Turretin, a distinguished minister and preacher of Geneva. Ninon tries to procure the learned Calvinist all the resources at her disposal : ' He found here friends of mine who have judged him worthy of the praise you give him. If he will make the best of the honest Abbés that are still here in the absence of the Court, he will be treated as a man whom you esteem.'

These Abbés of distinction were in fact rather numerous towards the end in Ninon's circle : there were the Abbé de Châteauneuf, Voltaire's godfather, the Abbé Regnier des Marais, the Abbé l'raguier, the Abbé Gédoyne, and others besides, all men of learning and at the same time men of the world and of taste.

Ninon adds : ' I read your letter before him with spectacles, but they are not unbecoming : I have always had a serious look. If he is fond of the merit that we call here *distingué*, perhaps your wish will be accomplished ; for every day people try to comfort me for my losses with that fine word.' Since then the word *distingué* has been much abused ; we here seize it at its origin, or at least in its most recent acceptation. To comfort Ninon for her old age, they would tell her that she was a woman *d'un mérite distingué*. In the middle of the seventeenth century, the word *distingué* was not used absolutely in that way. A person was *distinguished* by one quality or by another ; but it was for the eighteenth century, and especially the nineteenth to bring into circulation the expression *distingué* pure and simple, without any other qualification. To-day all the world is *distingué*, just as all the world wears the ribbon of the Legion of Honour in its button-hole.

The few letters exchanged between Saint-Évremond and Ninon might suggest many literary and moral remarks. They display a perfect sincerity, and human nature is neither disguised nor stilted in them ; we should wish at times that it had made some efforts to raise itself to a higher level. Saint-Évremond does indeed write to Ninon : ' Nature will begin with you to show that it is possible never to grow old ; ' he does indeed say to her, ' You are of all countries, as highly esteemed in London as in Paris ; you are of all times, and when I mention you as the glory of my time, the young men will immediately name you to claim the advantage for theirs : so you are mistress of the present and the past . . . ; ' in spite of all these fine words, Ninon grows old, she has her moments of sadness, and her way of putting them aside may seem sadder than anything : ' You used to say once, she writes to her friend, that I should only die of reflexions : I try not to reflect any more and to forget the morrow on the present day. Everybody tells

me that I have less cause to complain of time than any other. However that may be, *if any one had proposed to me such a life, I should have hanged myself.* However one clings to an ugly body as much as to an agreeable one. One loves to feel oneself at ease and at rest. Appetite is a thing that I still enjoy. . . . This idea of *appetite* recurs frequently in their correspondence and is rather naively mixed up with the tenderest expressions of friendship: 'How I envy those who cross into England, writes Ninon, and what a great pleasure it would be to me to dine once more with you! Is it not grossness, this wish to dine together? The spirit has great advantages over the body: however this body often furnishes some little tastes which are reiterated, and which comfort the soul for its sad reflexions.' Holding on to life only through the body and feeling that this body is every day growing less and wasting away, that is the general idea that prevails in this Correspondence of the two witty old people, which in the end affects the reader rather painfully. We feel better than they do what they lack in the order of elevated hopes. They themselves become aware of it in their turn, at the hour when they lose their dearest friends. Ninon loses Charleval, the most faithful of her old friends; Saint-Evremond loses Mme de Mazarin, who was his whole resource and stand-by. Ninon tries to comfort him in a sincere and sensible letter in which she cannot help concluding with these words: 'If we could think like Mme de Chevreuse, who believed when she was dying that she was going to converse with all her friends in the next world, it would be a pleasant thought.'

In perusing these pages, we begin to desire that these two amiable old people had had another spring of action, another incentive, though it were only an illusion. Their terrestrial morality is distressing; their horizon sinks lower at every step. Saint-Evremond believes in no future, and all his hopes, as well as all his happiness, end for him at the next or the present moment: 'I have no reputation in view, he says . . . : I regard a more essential thing, that is life, of which eight days are worth more than eight centuries of fame after death. . . . Nobody has a greater appreciation of youth than I have. . . . Live; life is good when it is without pain.'

Thoroughly as he understood the genius of the Romans,

here we see what he lacked perhaps to be their durable and definitive painter; he left that honour to Montesquieu. Fitted as he was by his good sense and his judgment to understand them, Saint-Evremond wanted that love of praise and of great things, that spirit of elevation which in all things inspired the people-king and which animated even the Epicureans of the best period, such as Cæsar, who were able to think as they pleased, but who, in action, so openly belied their teaching. Now, Montesquieu had that love and that generous incentive within him, and it was through that, as well as by his talent, that it was given him to produce an admirable work, a monument, while Saint-Evremond left nothing but a superior sketch.

As a man however always needs a more or less immediate motive and a reward, in default of posterity the two friends send each other by letter praises and compliments: 'Would to God that you could think of me what you say!' writes Ninon; I could dispense with all the nations. And the glory of it remains with you. Your last letter is a master-piece. It has formed the theme of all the conversations that have been held in my room the last month. You are returning to youth: you do well to love it. Philosophy goes well with the charms of the mind. It is not enough to be wise, one must please; and I see very well that you will always please as long as you think as you do. Few people can resist the weight of years. I believe that I have not yet allowed myself to be crushed by it.' And thus they afforded each other, by their wit at least and by their delicate praises, their last pleasures.

It is time to sum up on Ninon and to emphasise the only side of her that I regard. Her salon assembled a much greater variety than the Hôtel Rambouillet, and it united many classes of people. It united to the tone of the great world that of the genuine Parisian bourgeoisie. Mme de La Fayette had essayed for a moment to play that part which had previously been played by Mme de Sablé, 'to whom, says Gourville, all the young men had been accustomed to pay great respects, because after having been fashioned a little by her, they were qualified to enter the great world.' But Mme de La Fayette's health, and her disposition to take things easily, did not permit her to play this part for long. It was in great part taken by Ninon. She was qualified for the part by a greater gaiety

than Mme de La Fayette, and by a greater solidity than that other woman of wit of the same date, Mme de La Sablière.<sup>1</sup> It was at her house then and through her that the young men were wont to make their début in society. There was conversation and no gambling. Mothers tried to get their sons introduced there. Mme de Sévigné, who had so much reason to complain of Ninon on account of her husband and her son, saw without dread her grandson, the Marquis de Crignan, pay his respects to her. As fashion intervened and as consideration covers everything, Ninon was in the end extremely sought after by the women. 'The women run after Mlle de L'Enclos, said Mme de Coulanges, as formerly other people ran after her.' And thereupon Mme de Sévigné wrote to M. de Coulanges: 'Corbinelli tells me wonders of the good company of men he meets at Mlle de L'Enclos'; so she gathers all together in her old days, whatever Mme de Coulanges may say, both men and women.' No book gives us a better idea of Mlle de L'Enclos' salon in its last days, than the *Dialogue sur la Musique des Anciens*, by the Abbé de Châteauneuf: it is a conversation which is held at her house, in which she says her say with taste, with justness, and like the excellent musician that she was. On leaving her house the interlocutors continue to speak of her and her various amiable qualities. The Abbé Fraguier also described her on a very true page; and the Abbé d'Olivet (good Heavens, what a number of Abbés apropos of Ninon!), in a Latin eulogy of Fraguier, presents him at the moment when he wanted to write in French and cultivate a good taste in our language: 'To that effect, says d'Olivet whom I translate, he applied for his education to two Muses; one was that celebrated La Vergne (Madame de La Fayette), so often sung in the verses of the poets, and the other the lady who has been surnamed the modern Leontium (*Ninon*). At that time both of them held the sceptre of wit, and were considered as the arbiters of elegance. . . . The latter had been so fashioned by nature that she seemed a *Venus* for beauty, and a *Minerva* for wit. But when Fraguier first knew her, age had long deprived

<sup>1</sup> Ninon herself was accustomed to compare Mme de La Fayette with those rich fields of Beauce which yield excellent wheat, and Mme de La Sablière with a pretty flower-bed which delights the eye.

her of her dangers, and left only what was profitable and salutary.'—Do you know, says a humourist to whom I have just given this same passage in Latin to read, that from the way your Abbé d'Olivet speaks, I suppose that in the seventeenth century Mme de La Fayette and Mlle de L'Enclos, by their function of oracles of taste in society, were Boileau's two first curates?—It was in more or less approximate terms that all Ninon's last contemporaries speak of her. Is it necessary to recall that the Abbé de Châteauneuf one day presented to her his godson Voltaire, then thirteen years of age and already a poet? She seemed to have had a presentiment of what the boy would soon be, and left him by her will two thousand francs to buy books.

From Montaigne and Charron to Saint-Evremond, and from Ninon to Voltaire, it is only a hand's breadth, as we see. Thus it is that in the succession of ages certain minds form a chain.

And now, after speaking of Ninon with justice, with delight, without going too deeply into what must have been shameless in spite of all, what was unnatural at a certain hour, and pernicious in the disorders of her early life, we must never forget that a destiny so unique and singular cannot be repeated a second time, that it is the result of an incomparable good fortune, aided by a quite peculiar genius for conduct, and that any woman who should propose to follow her example and treat love lightly, with the reservation of afterwards considering friendship as sacred, would run great risk of remaining by the way, and of drying up in herself one of the feelings, without necessarily making herself worthy of the other.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I recommend the reader to read again what Jean-Jacques Rousseau says so sensibly and forcibly on this point in the fifth book of the *Emile*, in the passage beginning: 'Je ne sache que la seule Mlle de L'Enclos, etc., etc. ;' and the preceding note.

## JOSEPH DE MAISTRE <sup>1</sup>

*Monday, June 2, 1851.*

I SHOULD have been much embarrassed, I admit, if I had had to speak a few years ago of Comte Joseph de Maistre in the *Constitutionnel* or in any other journal of so-called liberal opinions. That writer had been given a quite peculiar reputation for absolutism; he was judged from an ill-read page of one of his works, and he was never called anything but the panegyrist of the *hangman*, because he had maintained that the societies which desire to remain strong can only do so by means of strong laws. To-day events have progressed; they are far from having put M. de Maistre in the right in all things, and it is possible that it is the contrary that has occurred: but they have gradually thrown a stronger light upon the loftiness of his views and their true meaning, the perspicacity of his fears, the wisdom of some of his regrets. In short, whatever place one may occupy in the great human hurly-burly in which we are all involved, we can no longer deny him to be a political philosopher of the first order, one of those who, whilst enlightening us upon the spirit of organisation of the ancient societies, gives us most to think about on the destinies and the future direction of modern societies.

At this moment an occasion offers itself to all to become still better acquainted with him, to associate with him more particularly and more personally than we have done hitherto. The family of the Comte de Maistre have decided to publish a large number of his Letters together with a few Opuscules that had remained in his portfolio. To these have been added the collection of little writings or pamphlets which issued from his pen during the first

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and unpublished Opuscules of Comte Joseph de Maistre, 1851, 2 vols.*

years of the Revolution, and which were hardly to be discovered. But it is above all the Correspondence that will appear entirely new and is of the greatest value. The superior man, and, besides, the excellent, sincere, amicable man, the father of a family, appears on every page in all the vivacity of his nature, in all the piquancy of his humour, and, if we may say so, in all the gaiety and cordiality of his genius. It is the best commentary upon, and the most useful corrective to, the other writings, so distinguished but rather haughty, of the Comte de Maistre, that they could have. We shall learn to revere and to appreciate near by the man who has so often surprised, provoked and perhaps angered us. This powerful stimulator of lofty political thoughts will become one of our particular acquaintances, and very nearly one of our friends.

Comte Joseph de Maistre, born in 1754 at Chambéry in Savoy, of a family occupying high judicial functions, the eldest of ten children, had been brought up in the spirit of antique severity, and he ever after preserved the stamp of it in his manner of life and his disposition :

'The principal feature of the Comte de Maistre's childhood, his son tells us in the *Biographical Notice*, was a loving submission to his parents. Present or absent, their smallest wish was to him an imprescriptible law. When the hour of study marked the end of play-time, his father would appear without a word on the door-step leading to the garden, and he was pleased to see the toys drop from the hands of his son, who never presumed even to throw his ball or send up his shuttlecock a last time. During the whole time that young Joseph spent at Turin attending the Law lectures at the University, he never presumed to read a book without first writing for permission to his father or mother at Chambéry.'

His mother, a lady of great distinction, had a great influence upon him, and she moderated the perhaps excessive rigour of this form of senatorial paternity, without however pampering him in any way. Comte Joseph worshipped his mother, his *sublime* mother, as he calls her : 'My mother was an angel, he said, to whom God had lent a body ; my happiness was to divine what she wished me to do, and I was in her hands as much as the youngest of my sisters.' Having been sent to St. Petersburg as Minister Plenipotentiary by his sovereign the King of Sardinia, he wrote from there to one of his brothers, and



he was then fifty-one years of age (February 1805): 'At six hundred leagues distance, the ideas of my family, memories of childhood, excite in me feelings of rapture mixed with melancholy. I can see my mother walking in my room with her sainted face, and, as I write you this, I weep like a child.' This first pure, narrow and strong education put the decisive touch to the already energetic nature of the young de Maistre; he resembled those oak-trees which obtain a foothold in a rugged soil and take firmer roots among the rocks. Buried, *plunged from childhood in serious studies*, his profession was the law, and he applied himself to it as a man of doctrine and practice, as a man might have done in the Italy of the sixteenth century. He was, with various titles and in different functions, a member of the Senate of Chambéry until the time of the Revolution, that is to say for nearly twenty years. He had early studied belles-lettres, and that was always his passion, which he fed in the midst of his duties. In his life of retirement he had learned as many as five languages; to these he added a little later Greek and German. He read everything, and books were his *cherished pasture*. Married at thirty-two (1786), he had become the father of a family in his turn. Such was the man with his simple and austere mode of life, his patriarchal mind, his antique manners, who was at once struck by the spectacle of the French Revolution, which soon sought him out and threw him back into his Savoy, which it overturned. M. de Maistre was just forty year of age: he quitted a country which, united by violence to France, no longer belonged to his sovereign. He lived three or four years in Switzerland, particularly at Lausanne, he saw there all the distinguished persons who passed through, above all Mme de Staël, against whom he held his own, and who from that time judged him to be a man of genius. His judgment of her is more varied and humorous:

'I do not know, he says in a letter, a more completely perverted head; that is the infallible working of modern philosophy upon any woman whatever; but her heart is not at all bad: on that point she has been wronged. As to wit, she has it to a prodigious degree, especially when she does not try to be witty. Not having studied either theology or politics together, we acted some scenes in Switzerland which would have made you die with laughter, without ever quarrelling however.'

These scenes *à mourir de rire* which passed between Mme de Staël and himself, M. de Maistre also called his *Soirées helvétiques*, and it is a pity that none of them have been preserved. Of a different nature to the *Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg*, they would have formed a pretty pendant to the latter.

It was about the time of his stay at Lausanne that M. de Maistre published, without putting his name to them, his *Considérations sur la France* (1797), an astonishing work in which the Revolution is judged, not only in its proximate causes and its immediate effects, but in its principles and sources, in all its bearings and in its development, even in its most distant phases, where the future Restoration is predicted and almost described in its ways and means. The impression this book made at its appearance was very strong; but its great explosion did not take place till twenty years later, when events had verified its most memorable points.

To explain as briefly as possible M. de Maistre's political spirit and his historical judgments, I will say that he was a thoroughly religious man, a deeply religious intelligence, who really and in all things believed in the rule of Providence on earth. Nothing is more ordinary than to meet with men who believe in God and in Providence, or who say they do, and nothing is more rare than to find one who, in all his actions or all his judgments, behaves as if he really believed in them. They believe in Providence in the gross, they believe in the reign of chance or of intrigue in particular. M. de Maistre not only sees the finger of Providence when he sees it avenging the good and chastising the wicked, but he still salutes and recognises that visible finger even in the triumph of evil and the wicked. One of the last poets of antiquity, Claudian, in a celebrated piece, showed how the triumph of a wicked man and a miscreant may disturb the heart of a good man and make him doubt in the existence of Gods. Claudian requires to see the fall and punishment of Ruffinus to deliver him from his doubt and absolve Providence. M. de Maistre, deeply Christian in doctrine, who knows that there are many kinds of culprits, even among those who call themselves honest, is not so ready to despair, and he thinks he discovers warnings or salutary chastisements, signs of return to the good even in the most disastrous and the

least comforting spectacles. Like Saint Augustine in his day, M. de Maistre is singularly ingenious in justifying Providence, in interpreting and proving it in and *through* the very calamities that it allows to break out and reign. Thus, according to him, the Revolution having been once let loose, even the Reign of Terror and the triumph of Jacobinism in France were only necessary phases to save society and the future monarchy. One of his great maxims was that 'the universe is filled with very just pains and punishments, whose executioners are very culpable.'

I am not here criticising that philosophy of history which lends a quite novel meaning to events; but if a man very really believes in Providence, in its real presence and its efficacious action in all things, he will be brought more or less to explanations of that kind. Would you know, for example, how M. de Maistre, who is at bottom hostile to the Revolution, esteeming it to be terrible and baneful, though only too well merited, judges the first defeats of the armed Coalition against France? Do not expect him to yield, like so many others, to his private inclinations and to be purely and simply afflicted at seeing the French victorious and the Coalition defeated. France, in M. de Maistre's eyes, who is French by language, and, in many respects, in heart and mind, France is an instrument, a European organ that nothing can replace, and which, even when it strikes falsely, must not be immediately rejected and broken: 'There is, he says, in the power of the French, there is in their character, there is above all in their language, a certain proselytising force which passes the imagination. The whole nation is only a vast *propaganda*. May God soon bring about the moment when she will *propagate* only what we love!' Whilst awaiting this better propaganda that he desires and which will perhaps come, he seeks to interpret to himself the superior reason which, in the order of the Providence he believes in, was able to determine the triumph of France over the confederate powers which aspired to break her up:

'Nothing proceeds by chance, my dear friend, he wrote to the Baron de Vignet (October 1794); everything has its rule and everything is determined by a power which rarely tells us its secret. The political world is as regulated as the physical world; but, as the liberty of man plays a certain part in it, we end by believing that it does all. The idea of destroying or

breaking up a great empire is often as absurd as that of removing a planet from the planetary system, although we know not why. I have already told you, in the society of nations as in that of individuals, there must be great and small. France has always held and will long hold, to all appearances, one of the first ranks in the society of nations. Other nations, or, to speak more correctly, their leaders, have tried to take advantage, contrary to all rules of morality, of a violent fever which had attacked the French, to throw themselves upon their country and divide it amongst themselves. Providence has said no ; she always does well, but never more manifestly, in my opinion. . . .

The Baron de Vignet, to whom M. de Maistre wrote the above, desired quite frankly the success of the Coalition against France, because he saw in it the general good ; *he did not go by four roads* (i.e. he was plain-spoken), as we say vulgarly. M. de Maistre thought on the other hand that, in human matters, Providence *goes by four roads, and by a thousand roads* ; and for his part, as he does not hesitate to say, if the Coalition triumphed completely, he would see in the destruction of France 'the germ of two centuries of massacres, the sanction of maxims of the most odious machiavellianism, the irrevocable brutalisation of the human race, and even, what would astonish you much, a mortal wound to religion : but all that would require a book.' This book exists in part in the *Considérations*, and also on many another page of his letters and other writings. But we already see that M. de Maistre is not an absolutist or an *ultra* like any other, and that he has his place apart.

The Monarchy, as he understood it, was certainly not the constitutional monarchy nor the English monarchy : however 'be persuaded, he wrote to that same friend, that, to *fortify* the monarchy, we must ground it on the laws, avoid arbitrariness, frequent commissions, continual changes of employment and ministerial speculations.' He was never placed in a position to act and to carry out his maxims. It is to be believed that, if he had been in active politics, he would have brought to them more moderation than is generally supposed. He had an axiom often present to his mind to temper his boldness, and that was a word of Plato and Cicero : *Never undertake in a State more than thou canst persuade.* 'If I were a Minister, he said, in the midst of a nation that did not want the Jesuits, I should not advise the sovereign to recall them,

in spite of my opinion which is favourable to them.' There we have, it seems to me, great moderation ; but immediately after he defines a *nation*, the sole union of the *sovereign* and the *aristocracy*. He does not conceive it in any other way : ' It is precisely in the higher classes, he thinks, that conservative principles and the true maxims of State reside. A hundred shopkeepers of Genoa would make less impression upon me with respect to what their country needs or does not need, than the house of Brignole alone.' We see how little all this can apply to France, which never had a patriotic and political aristocracy of that kind, nor to the modern societies which no longer suffer them. This religious and aristocratic monarchy of M. de Maistre, far from being able to impose itself at any moment upon France, was soon to be no longer possible even in his Piedmont.

M. de Maistre's turn of mind was so naturally aristocratic, that, politically speaking, he carried it even into the order of pure intelligence, and he seized upon this other saying of Plato : *The beautiful is that which pleases the honest Patriotic*. That is another point by which he differed from France, for one of the conditions of the beautiful, such as we love it in our free country, has always been, before everything, that it should be accessible to every honest, generous and popular mind.

These dissidences and these originalities already give us an outline of the man. Let us consider him from the only sides which concern us. When we approach M. de Maistre, we must not expect from him a political system properly speaking, nor practical counsels, nor anything resembling action. He said of himself and his character : ' God made him to think and not to will. I cannot act, I pass my time in contemplation.' Let us then approach with respect the great contemplator, and gather a few of his fine words as seeds that we will afterwards sow, each in our own ground, and which will spring up diversely enough, but always with fruit and heavenwards.

The King of Sardinia, dispossessed of his States on the continent, had taken refuge in his rude island. M. de Maistre, after sojourning there for some time and serving at the head of the judicial bench, was commissioned in 1802, by this half fallen and despoiled king, to represent him at the Court of St. Petersburg. There he resided fourteen

years, away from his family, severed in his dearest affections, having to pass through the terrible years of the Empire and to suffer the counter-blow of each victory ; poor, inadequately paid by his sovereign, warned at every moment of his precarious situation, sometimes wanting a fur-coat in winter and a secretary in his house, but enjoying a personal consideration and esteem that would have honoured every disgrace. The Correspondence which he kept up during these years, and which is published to-day, offers a powerful interest often mingled with charm.

The first letter, dated from St. Petersburg (July 1802), is about Bonaparte himself who was advancing to full Consulship and manifestly aiming at the Empire. A lady, a friend of M. de Maistre, was alarmed at this installation, which was becoming more and more supreme, of a power which appeared unlawful to her : ' With all the respect that I owe you, Madame, wrote M. de Maistre, I cannot share your opinion on the great event which is attracting the eyes of Europe and which appears to me unique in history. You see in it the definitive establishment, the consolidation of evil ; I persist in regarding it as a happy event under every possible supposition.' And M. de Maistre boldly enumerated these divers suppositions : ' If the house of Bourbon is decidedly proscribed, it is well that the government should be consolidated in France. . . ; it is well that a new race should begin a legitimate succession, one or the other, no matter to the universe. . . . I much prefer Bonaparte as king than as a mere conqueror.' If the contrary happens, and if the Bourbons are not rejected for ever, it is necessary to prepare the ways for their return, for they are not the people to originate anything themselves to that end : ' The French Bourbons, says M. de Maistre with a perfectly just historic appreciation, are certainly not inferior to any ruling race ; they have much intelligence and much goodness. They have besides that kind of *consideration* which is born of antique grandeur, and lastly, the useful education which misfortune necessarily gives ; but, although I believe them very capable of *enjoying* royalty, I do not think them by any means capable of *re-establishing* it. There is certainly only one usurper of genius who has a strong enough and even hard enough hand, to carry out this work.' And he examines, he turns over every side of his terrible dilemma,

preferring to dwell on the supposition that the Bourbons are not yet a *worn-out* race and are still able to carry out the functions of a truly royal race, in which case 'it is, in his opinion, Bonaparte's mission to restore the monarchy and to open all eyes, equally angering the Royalists and the Jacobins, after which he will disappear, he or his race.'

This view of Bonaparte, considered as a forerunner who is to prepare a universal Restoration in France and Europe, animates and sustains M. de Maistre during his long years of exile, and makes him exercise patience, even after Austerlitz, even after Jena, even after Friedland, even after Wagram. But what painful moments of agony, of expectation and labour there are for him! 'The state in which I live here, awaiting news (he wrote in October 1809), might be called *labour*, like the pains of a woman. What shall we see appear?'—'The state of minds in France, he writes again, is the favourite theme of all my meditations, and consequently of all my conversations.' He does not count, for the overthrow of Bonaparte and his power, on the armed conflict of Europe, but much rather on France and on public opinion within the country: 'As long as the French tolerate Bonaparte, Europe will be forced to tolerate him.' The more he examines what is going on, the more is he convinced that he will witness one of the great epochs of the human race. It is a commencing *era*, and what has been seen is only a preface. But he also knows that these great historical operations are of enormous length, and that they exceed the lives of many individuals: 'A man may see sixty generations of roses; what man can follow the full development of an oak-tree?' He is inexhaustible in happy images to express this terrible slowness, which, without baffling his profound hope, may put off the term until times that he will not see. 'The minutes of Empires, he says magnificently, are the years of man. . . . When I think that posterity will perhaps say: *This hurricane lasted only thirty years*, I cannot help shuddering.'

Moreover, to characterise Bonaparte and the kind of *temporary* providential mission with which he credits him, M. de Maistre finds only lofty and beautiful words. To the friend and confidant of Louis XVIII, the Marquis d'Avary, M. de Maistre writes (July 1807): 'Bonaparte writes in his papers that he is *the Envoy of God*. Nothing

is more true, Monsieur le Comte. Bonaparte comes directly from heaven . . . like the thunderbolt.' He does not see on him the *royal* mark in the sense in which he conceives it; he thinks him a rare, extraordinary man, and is fond, when speaking of him, of exhausting every epithet, only denying him that of *great*, 'which, he says, presupposes a morality which he does not possess.' But if he had to decide between the two errors, between the opinion of those who consider him as henceforth legitimately established in the state of a dynasty, and those who persist in seeing in him only the guilty adventurer, M. de Maistre would consider the latter opinion the more erroneous :

'A usurper who is arrested to-day to be hanged to-morrow cannot be compared with an extraordinary man who possesses three-quarters of Europe, who has had himself acknowledged by all the sovereigns, and who has taken more capitals in fifteen years than the greatest captains have taken towns in their life. Such a man is outside of the rank.. He is a great and terrible instrument in the hands of Providence, which makes use of him to overturn this and that.'

Such is his opinion, a very remarkable one in a man who sincerely believed in a sacred policy and in legitimate royalties.

At one time M. de Maistre wished to see Bonaparte and confer with him on the subject of the interests of his master the King of Sardinia, then so crushed. This circumstance is most interesting, looking at it closely. It is to be supposed that Napoleon knew M. de Maistre and had formed some idea about him. He had held in his hands, at Milan, the book of the *Considérations sur la France*, and he may in a very short time have detected in it a mind of a superior kind, and such as he loved. After Friedland and after Tilsitt, when General Savary came to St. Petersburg, that witty and intelligent soldier met M. de Maistre, and had the distinction of taking an interest in and liking him. M. de Maistre thought at the time that he might profit by that unusual occasion; that he might bring forward some good reasons in the interests of his sovereign, who had been dispossessed of Piedmont and almost struck out of the list of Kings. To obtain an indemnity for Piedmont, to obtain a formal recognition of the King of Sardinia, to see his



Ministers received at Paris, his flag respected, etc., those were points that M. de Maistre did not despair to win, if he might be admitted to discuss them with Napoleon himself. He took it upon him therefore to address a Memorandum and a letter to the Emperor through Savary, who undertook to deliver them : he asked to be called to Paris and admitted to plead confidentially before the arbiter of the powers. This request was not granted ; but everything proves that Napoleon did not resent the attempt. On the other hand, it was the King of Sardinia who, when informed of it, was indifferently pleased ; and one should read, on this subject, the very fine letter, not of justification or apology (he leaves that to those who have need of it), but of explanation and elucidation, which M. de Maistre wrote to an important personage at the little Court of Cagliari.

He forcibly sets forth the state of things, the all-power of the extraordinary man who dominates Europe, and whose character is above everything an *invincible will*. He shows how he comprehends Italy in the first line in his vast plans : ' and Piedmont, which is the key of that beautiful country, is also the province that he has most powerfully locked in his iron arms.' Not being able to tear it from him, what else can be attempted but to obtain a more or less disproportionate indemnity ? But if, to obtain it, Sardinia trusts to the foreign Courts and the great powers at the moment of the signature of treaties, she is much mistaken. Long ago the king-prophet, David (or some other) said : *Put not your trust in kings*, which means without any sarcasm ' that, all the acts of sovereigns being necessarily submitted to State reasons, which in their turn obey the eventual agitations of the political and moral world, to make one's security and safety to depend upon the constant dispositions of any Court whatever, is literally like trying to sleep calmly on one of the sails of a wind-mill.' These circumstances being once well known and defined, M. de Maistre then employed General Savary as a very direct and very safe, though quite accidental, channel, and made his attempt, a bold attempt without any doubt, but much less foolhardy than was thought in Sardinia :

' Besides, Monsieur le Chevalier, he writes to his disapprover, I had little fear of Bonaparte. The first quality of the man who is born to lead and enslave men, is to know men. Without

that quality, he would not be what he is. I should be very happy if His Majesty deciphered me as well. He regarded my attempt as an outburst of zeal; and, as fidelity pleases him since he has been reigning, by refusing to listen to me he has done me no harm. The legitimate sovereign, interested in the affair, may be mistaken on this point; but the usurper is infallible.

This whole letter should be read as a piquant lesson in politics. M. de Maistre feels, with the instinct of great minds, that, if for a single moment he is placed in a position to explain his views to that other great mind, Napoleon, he will be understood, and, in any case, appreciated and deciphered. As to the Cabinet of the legitimate king, that is another thing: the generous effort which the faithful subject made, at seven hundred leagues distance, caused him *the greatest surprise*:

'That is the word, Monsieur le Chevalier,' exclaims M. de Maistre, hardly containing his superior irony, the Cabinet is *surprised!* All is lost. In vain does the world sink to ruins, God save us from an unexpected idea! And it is that that convinces me still more that I am not your man; for I can indeed promise you to do His Majesty's business as well as another, but I cannot promise never to surprise you. That is an awkward point in my character for which I can hardly see any remedy.'

And drawing himself up in the consciousness of his strength before those men of routine, showing them that there have been more affairs lost in this world through excess of cunning than through unwisdom; that, if there was unwisdom in the present case, it would have fallen upon him alone, and that his idea besides had been approved beforehand by a small number of wise men whom he had consulted:

'Now, permit me to tell you, Monsieur le Chevalier, when an idea born in a *sound head surmounting an upright heart* has been besides attentively examined and approved by four or five men of weight, it ceases to be absurd or condemnable; it may be simply disapproved, but that is a very different thing.'

To get away from these vexations, from that forced inactivity and that waiting for a change which, near by and for contemporaries, seemed so long in coming, M. de Maistre, during his exile at St. Petersburg, throws himself

more than ever into study; he feels himself more than ever burning with a feverish desire for knowledge: it is a *redoubling* which cannot be described. But mind is not everything with him, he is not one of those whom half an hour's study and reading can comfort for every chagrin:

'I read, I write, he says, I try to deaden myself, to tire myself if that were possible. At the end of my monotonous days, I throw myself upon a bed where the sleep that I court is not always kind. I 'urn and toss, saying with Hezekiah: *De mane usque ad vesperam finies me, From day even unto night wilt thou make an end of me.* Then I think with bitter longing of my family. *I think I hear weeping at Turin*; I make a thousand efforts to picture the face of that child of twelve, that I do not know. I see that daughter who is orphaned of a living father. I wonder if some day I am destined to know her. I see a thousand black phantoms hovering in my chintz curtains. . . .'

He is thinking of his second daughter, born during the Revolution, from whom he had been parted since her birth. He did not in fact know her until 1814, and this idea of separation and paternal privation often returns to his pen, expressed with an intenseness that goes to the heart: 'The idea of quitting this world without knowing thee, he writes to her, is one of the most terrible that can present themselves to my imagination.' He had another, an elder daughter who was likewise separated from him, and who was then at a marriageable age, possessing every kind of qualification except a fortune; thinking of her he exclaims charmingly: 'Oh! that some romantic man would be content with happiness!'

His son Rodolphe had joined him at St. Petersburg, and had entered the Emperor Alexander's regiment of Knights-Guards. In 1807, in 1812 and since, this son took part in some terrible battles: 'No man knows what war is if he has not a son in it,' wrote the father to a friend. To this same son he wrote on the eve of the battle of the Moskowa: *In these days woe to fathers!* and alluding to the injunction of the Spartan mothers to their sons, to return either *with* or *upon* their shields, he says:

'However, my dear boy, *either with that, or upon that.* God forbid that I should give you any base counsels! I have not the same weight on my heart as when you were fighting against the Swedes: to-day, you are waging a just and almost holy

war. You are fighting for all that is most sacred among men, we may say even for civil society. Go then, my dear boy, and *return or take me away with you.*'

This powerful spirit, with such elevated thoughts and, at times, such haughty doctrines, this complete and stubborn patrician, poor at the time and reduced in private life to the hardest straits, although an ambassador and invested with a kind of official pomp, touches me doubly with his deep family feeling and his patriarchal virtues. The innocence of his life sustains him, his natural cheerfulness never leaves him. He works all day, he *revises his studies*. In the evening, he allows himself to be *dragged* to the house of some lady or some friend, seeking a little of that substantial or piquant conversation which is to him like the necessary *cup of coffee* to the mind :

' Here then or there I try, before ending my day, to recover a little of that *native* cheerfulness which has kept me alive up to now : I blow up the fire as an old woman blows upon last night's embers to light her lamp. I try to call a truce to the dreams of cut-off arms and broken heads which disturb me unceasingly ; then I sup like a youngster, then I sleep like a child, and then I wake up like a man, that is early in the morning, and begin my day over again, always turning within this circle, and constantly setting my foot in the same place, like the donkey that turns the fulling-mill.'

Thus, in the midst of this wakeful contemplation and these unwearying soliloquies, his *Russian portfolios* are filled, from which later and successively there issued so many writings that attracted the attention of the world.

A deep feeling for friendship brings him back to those whom he once knew and who have remained at the bottom of his heart. I recommend, among others, the delightful letter to his old friend Mme Huber, a Genevese lady and a Protestant : from it we see how far M. de Maistre was from being intolerant in practical life :

' Never, he writes to her with an adorable bonhomie which is unsurpassed even by that of Ducis, never do I see myself in full dress, in the midst of all this Asiatic pomp, without thinking of my grey stockings at Lausanne and that lantern with which I went to see you at *Cour*. Delightful drawing-room at *Cour* ! It is that which I lack here. After thoroughly tiring my horses along these fine streets, if I could find Friendship in slippers, and talk slippers with her, I should want nothing. When

you have the kindness to say with the worthy friend : *What memories ! what regrets !* lend ear, you will hear the echo of the Neva repeating : *What memories ! what regrets !*

But the letter is hardly written when the old friend dies, and M. de Maistre replies to Count Golowkin, their mutual friend, who had sent him the sad news :

' You cannot think how much that dear woman is present to me ; I see her continually *with her tall straight figure, her slight Genevese formalism, her calm reason, her natural shrewdness, and her grave playfulness* (what an admirable portrait !). She was a warm friend, though cold in every other respect. I shall never spend any better evenings than those I spent at her house, with my feet on the fire-dogs, my elbow on the table, thinking aloud, exciting her thoughts and rapidly skimming a thousand subjects. . . . She is gone, and never can I replace her ! When one has passed the middle of life, losses are irreparable. . . . Separated without hope of return from all that is dear to me, I hear of the death of my old friend ; one day the young will hear of mine. In truth, I died in 1798 (*the time when he left his country*), it is only my funeral that is put off.'

' These are sentiments, so true, so natural and so full of emotion, that we were not accustomed to associate with the name of M. de Maistre, and which will henceforth give to his physiognomy a more amiable and more human character.

Is it the systematic and pitiless man one has tried to make him out to be, who writes these tender words : ' Man has only dreams, he is himself but a dream. Let us except however, for our comfort, friendship, gratitude, all the good feelings, all those especially which are made to unite estimable men.' In the midst of all his honourable and even pleasant experiences in Russia : ' Still, he thinks, there are two things whose memory is hard to blot out, or can never be blotted out : *the sun and friends*.' The idea that he is never to quit this northern land weighs heavy upon him : ' The *never* is never pleasing to man ; but how terrible it is when it falls upon *our country, our friends and the spring* ! In certain situations memories are terrible ; I can see only remorse beyond.' For long we thought we saw in Comte Joseph de Maistre only the man of a superior mind and a brain of genius ; to-day we are happy to find in him simply a man and a heart.

His temerity, his outbursts of sarcasm, his raileries and his insults, with his pen in his hand, only dwelt as it were in the upper regions of his mind; they were the sallies, the flashes and the thunderbolts so to say of talent, of a too rich, a superabundant and solitary talent. As a man speaking alone and from a distance, whose voice rises in order to be heard, M. de Maistre lends to truth itself an air of paradox and the tone of a challenge. He loves to predict. Nature has given to his mind that distant sight, that marvellous prevision which seizes and anticipates the decisive moments, and he abuses it. He plays the prophet and is himself not unaware of this mental *trick* of his. In his humour and verve lies a talent for *raising a laugh by his arguments*; he employs it with success, in this sense that, even in the most serious subjects, he is never wearisome nor dull as M. de Bonald is too frequently. But he also abuses this laughter, and there are moments when it is misplaced. *God would laugh indeed if God could laugh*, he says somewhere, when he is making I know not what supposition; and elsewhere, he shows the heavenly Spirits as *laughing uproariously* at some blunder or other of men. This kind of tone is often enough in discordance with the seriousness of the subject. In controversy, strong in his conscience and the uprightness of his intentions, he goes too far, and he has an inkling of it himself, as when he says, for example, apropos of his Refutation of Bacon: 'I know not how I came to be engaged in a mortal struggle with the late Chancellor Bacon. We have *boxed like two Fleet Street porters*, and, if he has pulled out a few of my hairs, I think that his wig is a little awry.' But there was at least no gall mixed with M. de Maistre's polemics, apparently so warm and passionate. He had *heat without bitterness*. We have an example of it in this same Correspondence. Very violently or rather heedlessly attacked for one of his writings by one M. Sontag, Superintendent of the Church of Livonia, he shows a great deal of good feeling towards him: 'If I had the good fortune to be acquainted with him, he writes, he should see that, among men who are convinced, it would be difficult to find one more free from prejudices than I am.' If he ever passes through Riga, M. de Maistre promises himself that he will very cordially embrace that estimable man, and laugh with him over the whole newspaper quarrel. There we see the man in

M. de Maistre in all his candour and sincerity. He had nothing of the author but the talent.

As he grows older, these natural traits stand out more and more, with a little more brusqueness perhaps, but not less amiability. After 1815, when the house of Savoy is restored to its ancient heritage, on the eve of returning to his own country, but injured in his own fortune and almost ruined in his patrimony, M. de Maistre only cherishes the wish of the patriarch; he reveals his only and real desire in the midst of this European disturbance, when the volcano closes in one place only to open again in another: '*My family, my friends and my books will suffice for the days that still remain to me, and I should cheerfully end them if this family did not cause me terrible anxieties for the future.*' Alluding to that vivacity which he so readily brought into everything, and which he does not pretend to

'However, he wrote to a friend, if I had the pleasure of living some time with you under the same roof, you would be not a little surprised to see in me the king of idlers, an enemy to every kind of business, a friend of the study, of the couch, and soft to the point of weakness inclusively! for I do not pay compliments to myself: *Nuper me in littore vidi.*'

His tone, in writing these lines, might appear trenchant, his inner modesty was real. In a letter to one of his brothers-in-law we see him accepting reprimands of more than one kind for his playing upon words for *certain epigrammatic expressions which seem far-fetched*: 'I am sorry I have not a *warner* at my side, for I am extremely *jocund* to corrections.' That was true, and, when he was being printed, he was ready to submit to correction at the hands of one in whom he had confidence. In a more important order than the literary order, M. de Maistre shows a sincere humility which becomes touching in so highly gifted and so exalted a mind:

'I do not know, he wrote a few years before his death, anything about the life of a scoundrel, having never been one; but that of an honest man is abominable. How few men there are whose short career on this planet is marked by really good and useful acts! I will prostrate myself before the man of whom it may be said: *Pertransivit benefaciendo*; the man who has been able to instruct, to comfort, to relieve his fellow-creatures; the man who

has made great sacrifices to beneficence; those *heroes of silent charity* who hide themselves and expect nothing in this world.—But what is the generality of men? and how many are there in a thousand who can without terror ask themselves the question: What have I done in this world? *Wherein have I advanced the general work?* and what trace do I leave either good or bad?

He was accustomed to say that that which really separates man from the supreme truth, is the self-interest that each puts into his passion: 'Believe me, my dear friend, between man and God there is no pride. Bravely remove that cursed cataract, and the light will enter.'

Now to give a somewhat complete idea of this Correspondence, we should have to enter more into details than we have done, we should have to classify and analyse the letters with some method. Among the political letters, I will only indicate that which refers to the death of Pitt (March 1806), and that which makes the first mention of the Spanish insurrection (October 1809); they are of great beauty. In a quite different order, I will indicate the letters to his daughter, Mlle Constance de Maistre, on the education of women and on their natural function in society. No, women are not, according to M. de Maistre, capable of doing all that men do: 'The truth is precisely the contrary. *The women have produced no master-piece in any order.* They have produced neither the *Iliad*, nor the *Æneid*, nor the *Gerusalemme liberata*, nor *Phèdre*, nor *Athalie*, nor *Rodogune*, nor the *Misanthrope*, nor *Tartufe* (behold M. de Maistre placing *Tartufe* in the rank of master-pieces) . . . , nor the church of St. Peter, nor the Apollo Belvedere, nor etc.; they have invented neither algebra nor the telescope, nor etc., etc.; but they do something that is greater than all that: for on their knees is formed what is most excellent in the world, *an honest man and an honest woman.*' We can see from here all that his idea leads to; but how many gay and piquant developments I have omitted! It is in this order of truths that M. de Maistre is superior, and that he came at the right moment to cry *stop!* to the false theories of the Condorcets and the extravagant philosophers of the eighteenth century.

We owe thanks to the son of the Comte de Maistre for having decided to publish this Correspondence of his illustrious father and the different pieces which are joined to



it. We think we are right in saying that before the Revolution of February 1848 a learned and excellent man, the Abbé de Cazalès, was employed with the family in arranging these papers : but, since then, an interruption occurred in this labour, and a sort of discouragement that may be easily explained in the first moment. It was M. Louis Veuillot who, by looking after the present edition, enabled the public to enter more quickly upon the enjoyment of the fine things for which they might have waited for some time yet. It is with this publication, in a sense, as with that of Mirabeau of which we spoke recently : it appears in circumstances more favourable to success and for effect ; it is since the sores of society have been so widely laid bare and made manifest to all eyes, that we can best appreciate the depth and the range of the semi-prophetic philosopher's glance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The publications on Comte Joseph de Maistre are succeeding each other. M. Albert Blanc, Doctor of Law of the University of Turin, has published, since the above was written, the *Correspondence diplomatique* of M. de Maistre (1858), and has done his utmost, to draw the noble writer over to the side of the national cause of Piedmont, and to show him to have been entirely opposed and antipathetic to Austria. The reputation of the illustrious patrician is thus on the way of being transformed, and, if this goes on, he will soon have *changed his party*. Some very strong words on the Pope which escaped him on the occasion of the coronation of Napoleon have been seized upon, and the Voltairians have been able to rejoice, whilst appearing to be scandalised. This last diplomatic publication should deserve a special examination, and calls for an impartial criticism. Be this as it may, M. Albert Blanc has not discovered a new Joseph de Maistre, as he appears to believe, and as the ambitious formulas he employs might lead one to suppose. He is still the same man of intellect, the same Christian nobleman that we know, with his vibrating tone, his piercing words which burst from him, which at the first gush go further than would seem necessary to calm reason, but which we should be sorry to find more restrained and more circumspect ; for they carry many truths with them, and if they often appear to be angry, even when they concern friends, listen and learn to distinguish : it is the *anger of love*.

## MADAME DE LAMBERT AND MADAME NECKER

*Monday, June 9, 1851.*

I HAVE long had the intention of associating these two intellectual women who each had their literary salon, one at the beginning, the other at the end of the eighteenth century, and of bringing their two profiles into one and the same medallion. They have in common a pronounced taste for intellectual matters, and for reason enhanced by a certain distinguished, concise and novel turn, which unsympathetic people may easily confound with the studied and the *précieux*. Both ladies are governed by morality; propriety and duty regulate their manners and tone. Mme de Lambert, in the midst of the dissoluteness of the Regency, opens her house as a refuge for conversation, for clever badinage, for serious discussions: Fontenelle is the presiding genius of this delicate and polite circle, where it is an honour to be received. Mme Necker, born far from Paris, coming from French Switzerland of which she was the glory, would have desired nothing better than to find in Paris a salon exactly like that of Mme de Lambert, that is to say where the mind should find what it wants and respectable feelings would not be hurt. It was the form and the frame that would most naturally have suited her. Obligated to put up with the much more mixed habits of the day and to open her house to almost all who were celebrated in the world on various grounds, she brought into it at least as much order and organisation as was possible; she made her own choice among the objects of her particular admiration and esteem: Buffon held with her nearly the same rank as Fontenelle held with Mme de Lambert. But these points of resemblance or difference, which I only indicate, will become more defined after a precise study of the two characters; to-day I will

merely try to give a correct idea of Mme de Lambert and her circle.

Of the first sixty years of Mme de Lambert's life we know nothing or next to nothing. She died, we are told, in 1733 at the age of eighty-six, so she would be born about 1647. Her name was Anne-Thérèse de Marguenat<sup>1</sup> de Courcelles. Her father, a Receiver of the Revenue, came from Troyes, and the name Courcelles is taken from a little fief which he possessed quite near that town. She lost her father in early life. Mme de Lambert's mother, the daughter of a rich citizen of Paris, was a regular coquette, who deservedly formed the subject of one of Tallemant des Réaux' most scandalous historiettes. She was much more occupied with the attentions of the Brancas, the Miossens, the Chevalier de Grammont, and all the amiable young lords of the Court, than with her honest husband, who was weak-minded and was in the end even kept confined in a room as *hebetated*. This historiette of Tallemant raises (to tell the whole truth) doubts in one's mind as to the real claims of the bonhomme Courcelles to the paternity, and it would be unsafe to come to too rapid a conclusion on the point, even if there were more resemblance. From this moment Bachaumont became enamoured of Mme de Courcelles. When the husband died, he lived a few years with her, and then married her. This was the same Bachaumont who accompanied Chapelle on his famous Voyage, a man of pleasure and much wit. It is said that he was very fond of his step-daughter. What the influence of her step-father's circle may have been on the young girl, we may easily suppose, but can only conjecture. Fontenelle tells us that, after this time, 'she often shunned the pleasures of her age, to go and read in private, and that she spontaneously took to making little extracts of the things that struck her most. These were already either shrewd reflexions on the human heart, or ingenious turns of expression, but most frequently they were reflexions.' To me this disorderly and flaunted life of Mme de Lambert's mother points to a different kind of influence which is often observed in like cases, and which may be called an influence by contraries. How often has

<sup>1</sup> She signed herself *de Marguenat*, but d'Hozier (*Armorial*) calls her *Le Marguenat*.

the sight of a thoughtless and frivolous mother thrown a sensible and judicious daughter into an order of correct and severe reflexions! Everything seems to indicate that that was the effect produced on Mme de Lambert by her mother's bad example. A weak soul would have yielded and followed her example: a delicate and strong soul turned it into a moral and a lesson; she nobly took her revenge in a good sense. Mme de Lambert made it a point all her life to respect propriety the more, because she had seen it offended around her in her childhood; she set up consideration and honour as the principal object and the aim of all her conduct.

It appears that she was, on her father's side, heiress to considerable property. Married in 1666 to the Marquis de Lambert, an officer of merit who afterwards became Lieutenant-general, and whose father had been the same, she entered into a world that was more in conformity with her elevated instincts, and from her first surroundings she retained only a very strong taste for things intellectual. In her *Avis d'une Mère à son Fils* we may see what a high sense she had of military honour, and how much she espoused that religion of loyalty, devotion and self-sacrifice: 'I regret every day, she says to her son, not having seen your grandfather. From the good I have heard tell of him, nobody had in a higher degree than he the eminent qualities and the talent for war. He had acquired such high esteem and such authority in the army, that with ten thousand men he could do more than others with twenty thousand.' One day, at the siege of Gravelines, the Marshals de Gassion and de La Meilleraie, who were in command, quarrelled, and their strife was such that it divided the army: their troops were on the point of fighting together when the Marquis de Lambert, then only a Major-general, threw himself between the two parties and commanded the troops to stop in the King's name: 'He forbid them to recognise the generals as their leaders. The troops obeyed him: the two Marshals were obliged to retire. The King heard of this action, says Mme de Lambert, and spoke of it more than once with esteem.' It was with such examples that on her entry into her new family she raised her heart, and afterwards tried to nurture that of her children. The influence of Bachaumont and of the habits of her early education that still remained, only

affected culture and polish of the mind. Among the words and ideas that most frequently return to her pen when she begins to write, I distinguish especially the words *mœurs*, *innocence* and *gloire*.

Insisting on this principle of emulation and noble zeal, she went so far as to say to her son : ' One cannot have too much ardour to rise, nor feed one's desires with too flattering hopes. We need great aims to give a great impetus to the soul, without which it would never stir. . . . Nothing befits a young man less than a certain modesty, which makes him believe that he is not capable of doing great things. This modesty is a listlessness of the soul, which prevents it from taking its flight and rising rapidly to fame.' This seems an anticipation of Vauvenargues counselling some young friend, in the mouth of this mother issued from a rich and licentious middle class. Thus do vigorous souls renew their strength precisely where others become relaxed and corrupt. The excellent M. Droz, in a criticism of Mme de Lambert's writings, was struck by the danger and absurdity even of a morality that openly preaches ambition : I ask his pardon, but Mme de Lambert knew that at the time that she wrote this, the danger for this young warrior class lay rather in too much dissoluteness and enervation. Fénelon, judging these same *Avis à son Fils* of Mme de Lambert, said : ' Honour, the purest probity, a knowledge of the heart of men, reign in this discourse. . . . I might not perhaps entirely agree with her with regard to all the ambition she expects of her son ; but we should soon come to terms on all the virtues by which she wishes this ambition to be sustained and moderated.'

Mme de Lambert lost her husband in 1686 ; she had accompanied him two years previously to Luxembourg, when he was appointed Governor of that province, and, in this newly conquered country, she had helped him to win hearts : ' He had a light hand, she said, and governed only by love, never by authority.' She had devoted all her personal property, which was considerable, to advancing her husband's fortune and keeping up an honourable appearance. After his death, she busied herself perseveringly with the interests of her children, which had been much impaired in the long and cruel law-suits she had to sustain against her own family : ' There are so few great

fortunes that have been innocently acquired, that I pardon your fathers, she writes to her son, for not having left you any. I have done my best to put some order into our affairs; to us women is left only the glory of economising.' This dissatisfaction with the subordinate part that women are obliged to play, frequently shows through in Mme de Lambert. She had the skill to win her law-suits, to conquer as it were her property and that of her children, and then it was that she gave herself up to her tastes, by setting up a house in Paris, where gathered men of Letters, men of the world, and which gradually and imperceptibly became one of the first and most prominent from 1710 to 1733, that is to say during more than twenty years.

On a former occasion I have told how the last salons of the seventeenth century, that of Mme de La Sablière, that of Ninon, ended. To write a regular history of the salons of the eighteenth, we should have to begin with that of Mme de Lambert. About the same time, a little later however, would come that of Mme de Tencin, then those of Mme Geoffrin and Mme Du Deffand: thus we should come to Mme Necker. But Mme De Lambert undoubtedly begins and gives the tone to the new epoch. A few particular testimonies will enable us to judge the matter pertinently and almost as if we had been ourselves admitted:

'I have just had a very great loss in the person of Mme de Lambert, who has died at the age of eighty-six, wrote the Marquis d'Argenson (1733). Fifteen years ago I was among her particular friends and she did me the honour of attracting me to her house. To be admitted there was a mark of honour. I used to go to dine regularly on Wednesdays, which was one of her days. In the evenings there was a large company; there was conversation, and cards were no more thought of than at the famous Hôtel Rambouillet, so much celebrated by Voiture and Balzac. She was wealthy, she made a good and agreeable use of her wealth, did good to her friends, and especially to the unfortunate. A pupil of Bachaumont, having never associated with any but people of the world and of the most delicate wit, she knew no other passion but a constant and almost platonic tenderness.'

D'Argenson adds that she had tried to persuade him to enter the ranks for the French Academy. She assured

him of the support of her friends, who were very numerous in that body : ' It has even been attempted to ridicule, he says, what is a very real thing : which is that it was difficult to be received into the Academy unless presented at her house and by her. It is certain that she has made the half of our present Academicians.'

This influence of the salons on the French Academy, and the importance which this body is recovering, are among the peculiar features which signalise the beginning of the eighteenth century. The French Academy had not, indeed, the same importance at every period of its existence. It enjoyed very considerable importance at its origins and during the early stages of its career : the world and literature, in spite of a few revolts here and there, acknowledged it as the regulator of the language and its proper use, and even as a sovereign tribunal in the matter of taste. But, about thirty years after its foundation, when a young and bold literature had arisen under Louis XIV, when the Boileaus and the Racines, the Molières and the La Fontaines had really regenerated French Letters and poetry, the Academy found itself a little behind the times and out of date, and it remained so, more or less, during the last thirty-five years of the century. To live long is customary among the Academicians ; that is a habit which they have not lost, and that is, among others, a valuable advantage. But the result of this Academic longevity was that, in the second half of the seventeenth century, the Academy did not renew itself as quickly as the public might have wished. Boileau and La Fontaine waited a long time before they were admitted ; and, even after they were, there remained many men of the old taste, and others of a new taste, which was not of the purest, were already slipping in. Fontenelle joined the body very early ; his growing influence, joined to that of La Motte and other friends of Mme de Lambert, contributed to give to the French Academy something of that philosophical character which was to become very manifest during the eighteenth century, and to correct whatever insufficiency its grammatical or purely literary rôle might have had henceforth.

But we are considering Mme de Lambert's salon. Seeing the men of Letters so assiduous in their attendance at her receptions, and Messieurs of the Academy dining

there twice a week, the envious did not fail to accuse her of keeping a *bureau d'esprit*: 'It was, says Fontenelle, with a few exceptions, the only house that had kept itself free from the epidemic of gambling, the only one where one could meet to talk reasonably together, and even with wit on occasion. Hence, those who had their reasons for disapproving of conversation anywhere, hurled, when they were able to do so, a few malicious shafts at Mme de Lambert's house.' She was not insensible to these shafts, for she was particularly solicitous about public opinion. I have discovered a few of these reproaches, not in an enemy, but from the pen of a friend, M. de La Rivière, the son-in-law of Bussy-Rabutin, who had withdrawn in his old age to the house of the Institution of the Oratory. He was a man with a good deal of wit, with a facile and rather ornate style of writing, but who, towards the end, had taken to a meticulous piety. In ten passages of his Letters he shows Mme de Lambert under a rather peculiar light:

'She was, he says, my oldest friend, and my contemporary. . . . She was born with a great deal of mind: she cultivated it by assiduous reading; but the finest gem in her crown was a noble and lucid simplicity which, at sixty years of age, she was pleased to throw off. (Elsewhere he says: *She was seized with an attack of bel-esprit. . . . That was an evil which struck her suddenly and of which she died incurable.*) She gave herself up to the public, she associated with Messieurs of the Academy, and set up a *bureau d'esprit* in her house. I neglected no means to save her from the ridicule attaching to the profession of a bel-esprit, especially among the women; I could not persuade her. As I was born simple by taste and perhaps by necessity, I did not wish to appear an accomplice of such a caprice and took my leave of her. It is twenty-five years since I entered her house, except once when I went to see her to prepare her for her journey to eternity (that is to say to confess her). . . . She however retained her esteem and friendship for me to the end. . . . She came to see me and wrote to me from time to time: my replies were always aimed at her conscience.'

We see that there enters much austerity into this judgment of M. de La Rivière. We are tempted to ask ourselves if it was Mme de Lambert who was suddenly seized with the malady of bel-esprit at the age of sixty, or whether it was not rather he who was seized with an increase of



severity and scrupulousness. Be this as it may, it is good to hear what he has to say about her, and he unconsciously praises Mme de Lambert when he remarks that, in spite of all the rather rude criticisms which he wrote to her, she always remained friendly and indulgent towards him.

This same M. de La Rivière, humble though he has become, takes good care to remind himself, at the time when Mme de Lambert wrote her *Avis à son Fils* and *à sa Fille*, that she was assisted therein by one of her friends, who was no other than himself. He had suggested to her a few sentiments and thoughts, which she tried to turn, as he says, into precious stones and *cut diamonds*. But it is precisely this clear, brief and novel expression, which to-day forms the distinction and the value of those maternal counsels of Mme de Lambert. It is often well thought, but it is still better said.

Her little Writings appeared during her lifetime and without her knowledge at first, although, from the extreme care with which they were arranged, she seems to have had an eye to publication. She had lent her manuscripts to friends who, after the manner of friends, were indiscreet. The Counsels to her son first appeared in 1726 in the *Mémoires de Littérature* of Father Des Molets, under the title of *Lettre d'une Dame à son Fils sur la vraie Gloire*. The *Avis à sa Fille* were also about to appear without her permission, when she decided to publish an edition of the two opuscles in 1728. But it was much worse when the manuscript of her *Réflexions sur les Femmes*, a work of a much bolder nature and calculated to provoke the scoffers, fell into the hands of a bookseller and began to circulate among the public; she quickly bought up the whole edition or what remained of it, but she was unable to prevent its being reprinted outside the country. Henceforth she had to resign herself to praise and criticism, and become an author at her risk and peril, with all the honours of the war.

The *Avis d'une Mère à son Fils*, which are addressed to a young man who has already launched forth into a career, to a Colonel of twenty-four, and which I suppose to have been written about 1701, exhibit great elevation of thought and a piquant turn. I have said that fame is the aim openly proposed by the moralist, who, on this

point, is antique rather than modern and more in harmony with Plutarch than with the Gospel. Religion is here for the first time defined after the manner of the eighteenth century, and we observe already a precursory accent as it were of Jean-Jacques: 'Above all these duties (civil and human), says the mother to her son, is the worship that you owe to the *Supreme Being*. Religion is an intercourse established between God and men, by the grace of God to men, and by the worship of men to God. Elevated souls have for God feelings and a cultus that are not shared by the people: all comes from the heart and goes to God.' She rises up against the *libertinage* that is fashionable among the young men. The word *libertinage* always means, in the language of the seventeenth century, the licence of the mind in matters of faith, and it is in this sense that Mme de Lambert uses it: 'Most of the young men to-day think themselves distinguished by taking on an air of *libertinage* which brings them into disrepute with reasonable people. It is an air which proves, not a superior mind, but a dissolute heart. One does not attack religion when one has no interest in attacking it. Nothing makes one happier than to have one's mind convinced and one's heart touched: that is good for all times. Even those who are not happy enough to believe as they should, submit themselves to the established religion: they know that what is called *prejudice* holds a great place in the world, and that it should be respected.' Elsewhere, in a little Treatise *Of Old-age*, she speaks of piety, not as a weakness, but as a support which grows as one advances in age: 'It is a *decent* feeling and the only necessary one. . . . Piety is a decent feeling in women, and is suitable to both sexes.' This manner of regarding religion is irreproachable from the social and moral point of view; but the true Christian expects more, and I can understand the worthy M. de La Rivière not being entirely satisfied, on this point, with his friend's frame of mind.

He says of her somewhere rather ingenuously, speaking of her last illness: 'She fell ill; she was eighty-six years of age; I was afraid, I went to see her and confess her. She retained her mental malady to the last, for she chose for her confessor the Abbé Couet, who was a man of much wit and was known for such.' Mme de Lambert, who did

not readily part with her reason and her thought, even in matters of religion, used some beautiful words at the end of this same *Treatise Of Old-age*, when she said : ' In short, things are at rest, when they are in their right place : *the place for man's heart is the heart of God.* When we are in His hand, and when we submit our will to His, then our anxieties cease. . . . There is no safer refuge for man, than the love and fear of God.' One could not express oneself better, nor think more worthily. Here the idea of religion has grown wider ; it is no longer merely a decent feeling, but the highest of human proprieties, the end and the term of duties. In spite of this beautiful final word,<sup>1</sup> it is however very evident that Mme de Lambert's religion is rather an elevated form of the mind than an inner and habitual spring gushing from the heart, or than a positive revelation. She speaks of the Supreme Being ; she is capable of raising herself up to it, or even of reposing in it : but, however that may be, it already ceases to be the religion of the seventeenth century, and Fénelon, after reading Mme de Lambert, needed to be more indulgent on this point than Bossuet would certainly have been.

We continue to note in her those precursory signs which mark the transition to a new age. She constantly recommends her son to aim high in all things, and at the same time to hold to reality and not to appearance : ' Let your intimacies be with persons who are above you : you will thereby accustom yourself to respect and politeness. With one's equals one neglects oneself ; the mind becomes dulled.' That is a shrewd and just remark. But this superiority, she continues, should not be measured by rank alone, for there is a real and personal greatness, and a greatness of institution. To the one we owe only an *outer respect* : ' To merit we owe esteem and a *respect of sentiment.* When fortune and virtue combine to put a man into a high place, his authority is doubled, and demands a double submission.' But how rare is this

<sup>1</sup> A friend has pointed out to me that this thought, which astonished me a little coming from Mme de Lambert, is indeed only a quotation, an extract, slightly altered, from her readings. Here it is, as it may be found at the end of the *Life of the Abbé de Rancté*, by Marsollier : ' Things are at rest when they are in their right place and their natural situation ; *that of our heart is the heart of God,* and when we are in His hand and submit our will to His, our anxieties must necessarily cease, the troubles of our heart must end, and it must enjoy a perfect peace and tranquillity.'

coincidence ! At a distance the favourites of fortune impress us : ' Renown exaggerates their merit, and flattery deifies them. Approach them, and you will find that they are only men. *What a populace we find at Court !* ' What she says here to her son, she repeats to her daughter. She desires that she too, to be happy, should learn to think sanely, to think differently from the people on what is called morality and happiness in life : ' I call *people*, she adds, all who think basely and commonly : *the Court is filled with them.* '

These philosophic reflexions, which afterwards easily turned to declamation and excess, already appear in Mme de Lambert in a state of very distinct analysis. The word humanity often returns to her pen : ' Humanity, she says to her son, suffers from the extreme difference that fortune places between one man and another. It is merit that should separate you from the people, and not dignity or pride.' She repeats this sentiment in more than one place. Those who are above him she recommends him to judge by their reality and not by their outward appearance : ' But we must not lose sight of an infinite number of unfortunate ones who are below us. You owe to chance only the difference between yourself and them.' She repeats the same counsel to her daughter : ' Accustom yourself to be good and kind to your domestics. An ancient writer said that we should regard them *as unfortunate friends*. . . . Remember that humanity and Christianity make all equal.' The time is evidently approaching when humanity and equality will be spoken of on all sides ; she was one of the first to concern herself with these matters, to forbode them and mention them before Louis XIV was gone.

She is also one of the first moralists who, at the end of the seventeenth century, returned to the very un-Jansenist idea that the heart of man is naturally upright, and that our conscience, if we are able to consult it, is the best witness and the best judge : ' By the word conscience, she says to her son, I mean *that inner feeling of a delicate honour*, which assures you that you have nothing to reproach yourself with.' In her way she gives the signal which Vauvenargues will repeat in his turn, and which will become in the hands of Jean-Jacques an instrument of universal revolution.

We find in Mme de Lambert a few thoughts which we could imagine to be borrowed in anticipation from the moralists who followed her. We might think she was remembering this same Vauvenargues, who however came after her, when she says : ' I will exhort you, my son, to work upon your heart rather than to perfect your mind : the true greatness of man is in the heart.' On the other hand, if she anticipates her successors on several points, she repeats her forerunners on several others, and it would not be difficult to discover in her text thoughts that are *purely and simply taken* from Pascal, La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld.<sup>1</sup> In this respect she is like the old moralist Charron who is contented with expressing thoughts and joining them together, no matter where they come from, as long as he thinks them just and to his liking.

In her first work of advice to her son and in her subsequent writings, we easily distinguish in her certain virile, high-minded, superior qualities, a way of looking at things which presupposes much discrimination and power of analysis, a manner of expressing herself which always rises above the common. The only fault of these counsels in the reading, is that they give no breathing space ; the texture is too close and too tense. She tells us her own secret when speaking to her daughter : ' Relate little ; relate *finely and concisely* : let all that you say be *new*, or let its *expression* be *novel*.' It was this novelty that appeared in the light of neologism to some of her polished contemporaries, and which brought upon Mme de Lambert the charge of pretentiousness. We, who are less susceptible, and who are hardly touched and certainly no longer scandalised by these novelties of a hundred years ago, recognise her style to be quite full of very happily chosen words, of a clear and graphic acceptation. She said, for example, speaking of friends and the care we should take in choosing them : ' We must remember besides that our friends *characterise* us : people seek us in them. . . . ' She is fond of these brief sayings, in a style that is fine, antique and resembling Latin. She said again in her definition of friendship, of the qualities it demands, and the vices of the heart which it excludes : ' Misers do not know this noble feeling ; true friendship is *opulent*.' Again, recommending her son to distrust

<sup>1</sup> We have just seen how she borrowed from the Abbé de Rancé.

pleasures: 'To yield to voluptuousness is degrading. The safest would be not to familiarise oneself with it. It seems as if the soul of the voluptuary *were a burden to him.*' And to her daughter, on the same subject, and in a like recommendation: 'Flee spectacles, passionate performances. We should not see what we do not want to feel. Music, poetry, all that is *in the train of voluptuousness.*' I take a pleasure in pointing out these forcible or graceful expressions which belong to the language of the seventeenth century, and which at the same time already connect with that of the eighteenth by their perfect precision and their correct propriety. There are expressions which are less marked and more smooth, and charmingly placed: 'Allow your studies, she writes to her son, to *flow* into your manners, and let all the profit of your readings turn to virtue. . . .'—'In the tumult of the world, my son, she says again, have some sure friend who will make the words of truth to *flow* into your soul.' And lastly (for she is fond of this expression), in her little treatise *Of Friendship*: 'Let the hours be light, she exclaims, let them be *flowing* with those you love!'

She is not always so felicitous in the newness of her expressions, and they sometimes appear to be studied. Speaking of her friend La Motte, and to characterise the facility of his natural gifts, she says: 'These *souls of genius*, if we may call them so, need no foreign help.' Comparing him as a fabulist with La Fontaine, and replying to those who sacrificed one to the other: 'They believed, she says, that the only thing necessary to the Fable is the simple and the naïve of M. de La Fontaine; the fine, the delicate and the thoughtful (*le pense*) of M. de La Motte has escaped them.' The *pensé* of M. de La Motte is curious and well thought of, but it savours of mannerism. So in another place, counselling her daughter to be methodical in her chagrin, that is to analyse and decompose: 'Examine what causes your trouble, remove everything unreal that surrounds it and all the additions (*ajoutés*) of the imagination, and you will often see that there is nothing in it.' The *ajoutés de l'imagination*! all these expressions which I underline are clever, but flimsy, and liable to be subtilised.

The fault that becomes most perceptible in the long run is her continual affectation of analysis, her fondness for

periods of several members and compartments, which force the mind to seize complex relationships. She makes it hard for her readers. In one place she defines, for example, all the virtues in accordance with their degree of opposition to self-esteem (*amour-propre*): 'All the vices favour self-esteem, and all the virtues agree in combating it: valour *exposes* it, modesty *lowers* it, generosity *despoils* it, moderation *dissatisfies* it, and zeal for the public good *immolates* it.' That is wonderfully well said; but, in Mme de Lambert's time, it did not need a great number of these phrases to weary one who was not prematurely born with a mind of psychological and somewhat pedantic form.

They called that *précieux* and a relapse into the style of the Hôtel Rambouillet: we might also say very rightly that it was already in the direction and the taste of Mme Necker's salon. In my eyes Mme de Lambert marks the middle term between those two salons; she is half-way, and she is already looking in the direction of the more modern of the two.

The ideas she expressed on the rôle and the condition of women are at times calculated to surprise, whilst at the same time they inspire great esteem for the authoress. Mme de Lambert thinks with Mlle de Scudéry that nothing is worse understood than the education given to young girls: 'They are intended to please, we teach them only the pleasing accomplishments.' She, on the other hand, the daughter of a mother as we have described her, she early felt the need that women have to be reasonable and fortified against the passions. She thinks that a woman *should be able to think*. She distrusts the sentient parts: 'Nothing is more opposed to happiness than a delicate, lively and *too inflamed imagination*.' The virtues that shine are not the lot of woman: she appears to be rather painfully aware of it when she remarks upon it, as well as of 'the insignificance to which men have tried to reduce us.' Women must resign themselves then to the peaceable virtues, and these virtues are difficult 'because glory does not help us to exercise them.' The counsels which Mme de Lambert gives to her daughter are especially remarkable for an extreme understanding of all the tender and vulnerable sides of her sex, and for an extreme dread which makes her call to her aid every precaution and every resource. We might suppose that this woman, who was not spoken of

before she was sixty, stifled many struggles, many revolts, before that time, and that she had a great struggle. It was for herself in the first place, to harden and reform herself, that she wrote those sage *Advis* before passing them on to her children. In the preface to an English translation of her Works it was said that in writing on women she wrote her own apology. She replied proudly: 'I have never had any need to do so.' It was added that she had thereby betrayed a tender and feeling soul: 'I do not deny it, she replied; it only remains to know what use I made of it.'

This use is sufficiently indicated by the counsels themselves, so finely unravelled and so forcibly defined: she raised her heart, she fortified her reason, she avoided occasions and perils; she controlled her inclinations, and stunted her sensibility to make it more durable and as long as the longest life: 'When we have a sound heart, she thought, we make the best of everything, and everything turns to pleasures. . . . We corrupt our taste by amusements; we become so accustomed to keen pleasures that we cannot come down to the simple ones. We should dread these great concussions of the soul, which prepare ennui and disgust.' She said excellent things on this moderation and temperance of healthy souls, — things which can only have been thought of by an ardent soul that has partly conquered itself. In more than one of her counsels we think we see the beginning of a confession and an experience arrested in time:

'All profligacy of the heart is attended by a punishment and shame which urge you to quit it.'

'It is not always our faults that ruin us, but our behaviour after committing them.'

'Passion is increased by the retrospections we make: forgetfulness is the only security against love.'

And so many other thoughts on account of which Mme de Lambert would deserve to be called the La Bruyère of women. She shares this honour with Mme de Staël and Launay.

We might reconstruct, after a little meditation, a young, prudent Mme de Lambert, who repressed her tenderness. I know nothing about her face, and those who have written about her in her old age forgot to mention it. But



as she had been a *very pretty mother*, and as she had a daughter to whom she was able to say : ' *You were not born without charms,*' it may be supposed that she herself was not devoid of some grace. Her chastity is the more meritorious.

In her *Réflexions sur les Femmes* properly so-called, which are distinct from her *Avis à sa Fille*, she was rather emancipated. She boldly takes Molière to task, on account of the ridicule which he cast on learned women. She points out that, after they were rallied on this intellectual pretension, the women replaced learning by licentiousness : ' When they saw themselves attacked in their innocent amusements, they understood that, if they were to incur any shame, they had but to choose that which repaid them better, and they gave themselves to pleasures.' This little work of Mme de Lambert, in which there is more than one idea that may be open to discussion, should not be dissociated from the circumstances which inspired it : it was written to avenge and vindicate the honest and substantial occupation of the mind by her sex in the presence of the orgies of the Regency period. It is my *intellectual debauchery*, said Mme de Lambert. At the sight of the Duchesse de Berry and her gross licentiousness, she went back in imagination to Julie, Duchesse de Montausier.

To these shameless women of the Regency Mme de Lambert preferred even the learned Mme Dacier, whom she regarded as an authority in the honour of her sex : ' She contrived, she said, to combine learning and the proprieties ; for at present modesty has become misplaced, the women are no longer ashamed of the vices, and only blush for learning.' In the quarrel which arose between that learned lady and La Motte on the subject of Homer, Mme de Lambert, whilst inclining towards the latter, who was more polite and more delicate, tried to restore the balance and bring about a reconciliation, which took place a little later through the intervention of M. de Valincour. Mme de Lambert would have been pleased to rob the latter of the honour of this arbitration, and to have given the two adversaries at her own house that famous reconciliation dinner, of which a witty guest said : ' They drank to the health of Homer, and all passed off well.'

When the Duchesse du Maine was at Paris, she frequently came to Mme de Lambert's Tuesdays, and there was then an increased expenditure of wit and a display of gallant ingenuities. La Motte devoted a whole volume of his works to these society nothings. On ordinary Tuesdays, the conversation at Mme de Lambert's was more serious and more uniform, though always very pointed. The Marquis de Sainte-Aulaire, on quitting the refinements of the little Court at Sceaux, wearied by this expenditure of wit, exclaimed rather gaily:

Je suis las de l'esprit, il me met en courroux,  
Il me renverse la cervelle :  
Lambert, je viens chercher un asile chez vous  
Entre La Motte et Fontenelle.

There, you will say, is a strangely placed naturalness, and between two singular neighbours. But everything is relative, and when we feel stifled with the heat a few degrees less in another room immediately affects us like the freshest of spring air.—We may add the M. de Sainte-Aulaire was at home in Mme de Lambert's salon: for if, as has been said, 'she knew no other passion but a constant and almost platonic tenderness,' he was the object of it.

Among all the men of wit who came to her house, of whom I may mention Mairan, the Abbé de Mongault, the Abbé de Choisy, the Abbé de Bragelonne, Father Buffier, President Hénault, Mme de Lambert had made a second choice in the person of M. de Sacy, the elegant translator of Pliny the Younger, in whom she saw a union of all the virtues and all the charms, the *morals* and the *graces*. The company of her other friends was agreeable to her, that of M. de Sacy was necessary. More than forty years later, d'Alembert, writing among his other Academic Eulogies that of M. de Sacy, drew a touching picture of this friendship which united him to Mme de Lambert, and in doing so made a touching allusion to his own intimacy with Mlle de Lespinasse, whom he had just lost.

The literary conclusion on Mme de Lambert, that meritorious lady, at once so refined and so right-thinking, who made so noble a use of her qualities and her fortune, has long been given by one of her other friends whom I

have already mentioned, the judicious Marquis d'Argenson : ' Her works, he wrote, contain a complete Course of the most perfect morality for the use of the world and the present time. There mingles with it a little affectation of *préciosité*; but how many beautiful thoughts, how many delicate sentiments ! How well she speaks of the Duties of women, of Friendship, of Old-age, of the difference between *Consideration* and *Reputation* ! It is a book to be ever read over and over again.'

In all this article I have only mentioned Mme Necker, I have only inscribed her name by the side of and opposite to Mme de Lambert's, to indicate at once my design and to open out a view. I will return some day and speak with more detail of this second figure, and I shall still have to do, in an example that is more piquant than is generally supposed, with honesty, morality and the culture of the mind.

## MADAME NECKER

*Monday, June 16, 1851.*

To rightly appreciate Mme Necker is a task that is not without its difficulties. Her faults are of a kind which most easily give offence in France, they are not French faults; and her qualities are among those which too often hold a subordinate rank in society to matters of tact and taste, for they are the outcome of soul and character. I should like to deal fairly with both sides, and to judge this lady of merit in all freedom, but always with consideration and respect. We may judge a public man, whether living or dead, with some severity; but it seems to me that a woman, even if dead, when she has remained a woman in her essential qualities, is in a slight degree still our contemporary; she is so especially when she has not ceased to exist in our own days in a famous, virtuous and graceful posterity.

In order to properly appreciate Mme Necker, who in Paris was never more than a transplanted flower, one should see her in her first freshness and in her native country. Mlle Suzanne Curchod was born about 1740, in the Pays de Vaud, at Crassier, on the frontier of France and Switzerland. Her father was a pastor or minister of the Holy Gospel; her mother, a native of France, had preferred her religion to her country. She was brought up and reared in that life of the country and the presbytery in which several poets have laid the scene of their most charming idylls, and there she acquired, with the virtues of the home, the principle of serious studies. She was handsome, with that pure, virginal beauty, which needs the first youth. Her long and rather straight face was enlivened by a brilliant freshness, and softened by her blue and innocent eyes. Her slender figure had a becoming dignity, without any stiffness or primness. Thus

she appeared the first time to Gibbon, during a visit that she made to Lausanne. The future historian of the Roman Empire was himself very young at the time ; his father had sent him to Lausanne to repair his education and to become cured 'of the errors of popery,' into which the young Oxford student had let himself be dragged. Gibbon spent five years in that agreeable exile, between the age of sixteen and twenty-one. In June 1757 (he was twenty years of age), he first met Mlle Suzanne Curchod who was generally known in Lausanne as *la belle Curchod*, and who could not appear in any assembly or at any play without being surrounded by a ring of worshippers. That evening Gibbon wrote this sentimental and classic entry in his *Journal* : 'I saw Mlle Curchod.—*Omnia vincit Amor, et nos cedamus Amori.*' In his *Memoirs* he goes into greater details, and gives us the most flattering and the most faithful portrait at that time of Mlle Curchod :

'In the solitude of a sequestered village, he says, he (her father) bestowed a liberal, and even learned, education on his only daughter. She surpassed his hopes by her proficiency in the sciences and languages ; and in her short visits to some relations at Lausanne, the wit, the beauty, and erudition of Mademoiselle Curchod were the theme of universal applause. The report of such a prodigy awakened my curiosity, *I saw and loved.* I found her learned without pedantry, lively in conversation, pure in sentiment, and elegant in manners ; and the first sudden emotion was fortified by the habits and knowledge of a more familiar acquaintance. She permitted me to make her two or three visits at her father's house. I passed some happy days there, in the mountains of Burgundy, and her parents honourably encouraged the connection. . . .'

Gibbon, who had not yet acquired that grotesque ugliness which he developed since, and who already combined 'the most brilliant and varied wit with the mildest and most even of all characters,' maintains that Mlle Curchod was sincerely touched ; he himself went so far as to speak of marriage, and not till his return to England did he renounce her, on finding that his father was opposed to the union. But with Gibbon it all went off with an evenness and a tranquillity, even in his chagrin, that makes one smile. Seven years later, on his return from Italy, he saw her again at Paris, newly married to M.

Necker, when she received him with a mixture of cordiality and malice :

' I do not know, Madame, wrote Mme Necker to one of her Lausanne friends (November 1765), if I have told you that I have seen Gibbon ; I was sensible to this pleasure beyond all expression ; not that I still cherish any feeling for a man who, I think, hardly deserves any, but my feminine vanity has never had any more complete and more honest triumph. He remained a fortnight in Paris ; I have had him every day at my house ; he has become mild, compliant, humble, modest to the point of bashfulness. A continual witness of my husband's tenderness, wit and cheerfulness, an ardent admirer of opulence, he first called my attention to that which surrounds me, or at least hitherto it had only aroused a disagreeable sensation in me.'

As for Gibbon, when relating the impressions he received on this return, he pretends to be a little piqued in his old love or in his vanity as a sacrificed lover ; but, on looking more closely into the matter, we see that he was rather charmed to find henceforth in Mme Necker, when he comes to Paris, a natural introducer to the best society, especially to that circle of philosophers and wits to which he was so curious and so worthy to belong, living as he did the intellectual life.

Mlle Curchod, at the age of eighteen, was, as we have seen, at this period of 1758 one of the flowers and marvels of that Pays de Vaud which Rousseau was to bring into vogue in the fine Parisian society through his *Nouvelle Héloïse*. Rousseau however contrived to be unjust towards that pleasant country, at the same time that he depicted it as a frame for an earthly paradise : ' I would readily say, he wrote in a celebrated page of his *Confessions*, to those who have taste and feeling : Go to Vevay, visit the country, investigate the locality, make excursions on the lake, and say whether nature has not made this beautiful country for a *Julie*, for a *Claire* and a *Saint-Preux* ; but do not expect to find them there.' And I will say, and all who have known and lived in that country will say : Yes, you may expect to find there, if not a *Julie* and a *Saint-Preux*, at least women after the manner of *Claire* ; I mean thereby a certain turn of wit mingled with seriousness and gaiety, at once natural and laboured, very capable of reasoning, of study, of dialectics even, lively however, rather unexpected, and by no means

devoid of charm and attraction. Mlle Suzanne Curchod, in her particular shade, was one of those complicated and ingenuous minds, which are far from displeasing when one meets them on the spot, on the slopes or in the windings of those green terraced hills which fringe the beautiful Lake Lemman on the Swiss side.

At this time Voltaire, after his return from Prussia and before settling down near Geneva, tried this new life at Lausanne, where he spent especially the winters of 1756, 1757 and 1758; there he found to his astonishment a taste for intellectual things which he helped to develop still more, but which he had no need to create: 'The cockneys of Paris think, he wrote, that the whole of Switzerland is a wild country; they would be greatly astonished to see *Zaire* played at Lausanne better than it is played in Paris: they would be still more surprised to see two hundred spectators who are as good judges as any, in Europe. . . . I have made tears to flow from all the Swiss eyes.' Discount these praises as much as you please, make due allowance for politeness and hospitality, and there will still remain something over. It was in this world that Mme Necker, when a girl, blossomed out into her first prime, and that she shone.

Having lost her revered father about this time, and left alone with her mother and without any fortune, she excited a keen interest among all the people who knew her; and, as in this part of French Switzerland teaching and education are held in great esteem, it was suggested to her that she should give lectures on languages and the learned subjects that she had acquired in her father's presbytery. She did so with success, with éclat; she gave courses of lectures, according to the time-honoured custom in Switzerland; she had pupils of both sexes; and there was still shown a few years ago, in a little valley near Lausanne, the platform or mound of verdure, which had been erected by the students of the place as a kind of reading-desk or throne, and from which the fair orphan girl of Crassier awarded her praises or prizes, or perhaps even taught under the open sky on fine summer days. Some of these memories of Lausanne still clung to Voltaire's mind when, ten years later, he wrote to Mme Necker, then a great lady in Paris, who gathered the philosophic wits at her Friday's dinners:

Vous qui, chez la belle Hypathie,  
Tous les vendredis raisonnez  
De vertu, de philosophie, etc.

These particulars, which to-day form the tradition or the consecrated legend of the country-side, were not superfluous to show how solemn, studied and academical, and at the same time how simple, rural and innocent was Mme Necker's early education.

In these years Mlle Curchod lost her mother, who had assisted at all her triumphs and had shared in them. Her friends were then more seriously anxious about this beautiful, virtuous and learned girl who was approaching her twenty-fifth year. It was decided that she should leave for Paris, whither she was taken by a woman of the world, Mme de Vermenou, who, in passing through Geneva, had seen her and had been taken with her merits. Mme de Vermenou, who was a widow, had been sought in marriage by M. Necker, an already rich banker, a member of the Company of the Indies, and thirty-two years of age; she had not yet been able to make up her mind to give him a favourable answer. But no sooner had he seen at her house the young lady she had brought with her from Switzerland, when he transferred his choice, and it was Mlle Curchod who, after a few months of residence in Paris, became Mme Necker (1764).

In a series of letters written by Mme Necker to one of her friends at Lausanne, we may read her successive thoughts and impressions in the new world into which she is launched.<sup>1</sup> She at once feels transplanted and out of her element. Her intellectual tastes are satisfied, the needs of her heart begin to cause her pain: 'How sterile in friendship is this country!' she exclaims. When she is better informed she takes back this word, and says a few years later: 'In spite of prejudice, I have found in the midst of Paris men of the purest virtue, and susceptible of the tenderest friendship.' But it takes her more than a day to make this observation. Her health is affected from the very first; the cause of this alteration cannot be

<sup>1</sup> These letters of Mme Necker to Mme de Brenles may be seen in a volume of *Lettres diverses recueillies en Suisse*, published by Count Fedor Golowicki (Geneva, 1821). In his notes the editor tried to draw some subtle conclusions which are unfavourable to Mme Necker, and which I cannot share.



divined, but it is partly the result of home-sickness and of the nervous fatigue which only increases with years, in this novel situation where fortune is bought at the price of so many duties and exacting proprieties. Mme Necker had formed her ideas of the authors and men of wit of Paris solely through books, and she saw that the world through which she had to steer was very different, much more varied and full of shades : ' On arriving in this country, she says, I thought that Letters were the key to everything, that a man cultivated his mind only through books, and that he was great only through knowledge.' But the kind of conversation which harmonised with this idea was hardly current except in tête-à-tête, and she was not long in perceiving her error : ' I had not a word to say in society, she adds ; I was ignorant even of the language. Obligated, by my condition as a woman, to captivate minds, I was ignorant of all the different shades of self-esteem, and I offended when I expected to flatter. What we called candour in Switzerland became egotism in Paris ; neglect of little things here became a sin against the proprieties ; in a word, continually out of tune and disheartened by my blunders and my ignorance, never thinking of the appropriate word, and foreseeing that my present ideas would never link themselves with those which I was obliged to acquire, I have buried my little capital never to see it again, and have begun to work for my living and to amass a little if I am able.' It is this painful effort which makes itself felt in all that Mme Necker writes, and which helped to prematurely undermine her health. No brain ever had to work harder and take more trouble than hers. Set, from the first months after her arrival in France, at the head of a house in which she received all who were most in vogue among the men of Letters of Paris, zealous to be equal to her task and with success, a rival and disciple of Mme Geoffrin, she had continually to take it out of herself, to waste her health, to suppress her cherished habits and all her other inclinations : ' I must take this opportunity to make a confession to you, she wrote in 1771 to a friend in Switzerland, and that is that, since the day of my arrival in Paris, I have not lived for a single instant on the stock of ideas I had acquired ; excepting the moral part of it, I have been obliged to repair my mind and *make an entirely new thing*

of it, for the judgment of character and circumstances, and for conversation.' And indeed, if we consider a little, leaving aside the honest Thomas, with whom she made acquaintance at the beginning, and who responded to the serious and somewhat solemn parts of her soul; excepting Marmontel too, who had the merit of understanding her, and later Buffon, who was able to appreciate her homage and who paid her back in admiration, who were the men of Letters she came in contact with, and that she was anxious to entertain regularly and group around her? There was the little Abbé Galiani, 'who could not forgive her her virtue, and for observing the *cold demeanour of decency*;' there was Diderot, who wrote in August 1765 to Mlle Volland: 'There is here a certain Mme Necker, a pretty woman and a bel-esprit, who is mad on me; it is quite a persecution to have me at her house. Suard is paying his court to her, etc., etc.' It was this crowd of more or less gallant and infidel wits; there was the Abbé Arnaud, the Abbé Raynal, there was the Abbé Morellet, who was one of the first she had recourse to when starting her salon: 'The conversation was good, says the Abbé Morellet, although a little checked by Mme Necker's austerity, since many subjects could not be touched upon, and she was particularly pained by the freedom of our religious opinions. But, in the matter of literature, the talk was agreeable, and she herself spoke very well about it.' We can imagine the labour and effort at regeneration that must have taken place in Mme Necker's mind in presence of this quite novel world, especially when the circle of her acquaintances became gradually wider, as M. Necker soared higher into importance. To mention all she received in her Parisian salon or in her park at Saint-Quen, we should have to enumerate the élite of France.

M. Necker, it has been remarked, did not at first cut much of a figure in his wife's salon except by his observant attitude, and by a disdainful, or perhaps prudent silence, on subjects with which he was not very conversant. From

<sup>1</sup> Buffon composed two Latin lines to be inscribed below Mme Necker's portrait; they are as remarkable for their enthusiastic praise as for their inelegance:

Angelica facie et formoso corpore Necker  
Mentis et ingenii virtutes exhibet omnes.

time to time only he came out of this silence with some piquant sally, with a sly or humorous observation called forth by some eccentricity or absurdity. This serious man had a shrewd and bantering turn of mind which was peculiar to him, and he proved it since by certain writings which testify to a minute and penetrating power of observation. Mme Du Deffand, that severe and formidable critic, who afterwards became intimate with the Neckers, had a high appreciation of the husband and acknowledged the wife to be a woman of wit and merit ; she said of him however that with all his good qualities he lacked one, the one that makes a person most agreeable, '*a certain facility which so to say imparts wit to those we are talking to* ; he does not help one to bring out one's thought, and one feels more stupid with him than when alone or with others.' An excellent definition of the effect produced by that elevated, isolated and somewhat unsympathetic class of mind, that doctrinaire mind, to call it by its right name, of which M. Necker was the original possessor in France. Mme Necker, under her cold and contained bearing, loved her husband with a feeling of exaltation, with adoration, and he paid her back with the same feeling. Among the singularities of the period not the least was this kind of altar to good and chaste marriage erected in the heart of Paris and in the midst of the sect of philosophers.

'I am very fond of some of our modern philosophers, but I do not like their philosophy,' said Mme Necker. In a letter in which she excuses herself for not being able to present to them two young Zurichers, she describes them as unable to restrain themselves in their talk, as working in the mornings in their study, then talking for the rest of the day : 'The morning is devoted to study, and their freedom of thought is such, that they cannot make up their mind to meet strange faces in the houses they frequent ; for freedom of thought implies a strong desire to talk ; I meet some of them, and fortunately their morals, which are very honourable, correct the impression of their principles, else it would be better to eschew this kind of society.' But to eschew it would have been too great a sacrifice ; it is to her credit that she reconciled this excessive fondness for intellectual things with the integrity of her principles in so perilous a neighbourhood.

Strange to say! in spite of the reserve that had to be observed in religious matters, free-thinkers like Diderot felt much more at their ease at Mme Necker's than at Mme Geoffrin's. In the salon of the latter everything was governed by social prudence, by strict propriety; with the former virtue and a kindly heart showed itself even through disagreement and censure.

It was in Mme Necker's salon, and under her inspiration, that the idea first arose, in 1770, of erecting a statue to Voltaire. The latter wrote to her on this subject several amusing letters and even some gallant madrigals. Pigalle was chosen to execute the statue of the patriarch; but when she heard that the sculptor intended to make it absolutely nude, Mme Necker loudly protested. That was not what her modesty had intended.

Marmontel who should always be quoted on a question merely of society pictures or literary criticism, and who, in this order of ideas, offers an excellent type of the most distinguished of second-rate talents, judged Mme Necker in a page which could not be improved upon. He throws a perfect light upon the two essential features which crossed in her and characterise her, *complication of the mind* and *rectitude of the heart*:

'Strange to the ways of Paris, Mme Necker had none of the charms of a young Frenchwoman. In her manners, in her language, there was neither the air nor the tone of a woman brought up in the school of the arts, formed in the school of the world. Without any taste in dress, without any ease in her bearing, without any attraction in her politeness, her mind, like her demeanour, was too much adjusted to have any grace.

'But a charm that was more worthy of her was that of modesty, of innocence, of kindness. A virtuous education and her solitary studies had given her everything that culture can add in a soul to an excellent nature. Feeling, in her, was perfect; but the thought in her head was often confused and vague. Instead of clearing up her ideas, meditation troubled them; she thought to enlarge them by exaggeration; to widen them, she lost herself in abstractions or hyperboles. She seemed to see certain objects only through a mist which made them bigger in her eyes; and then her expression was so inflated, that her magniloquence would have been laughable, if one did not know that she was ingenuous.'

In the matter of taste, Mme Necker, who had little self-reliance and judged only through reflexion, as is ordin-

arily the case with those who have spent their youth away from Paris, thought, when she arrived in the capital, that she had but to take lessons in that as in everything else : 'The only advantage of this country, she wrote after a year's residence, is that it forms the taste, but at the expense of genius ; they turn a phrase over in a thousand ways, they compare the idea in all its relations. . . .' And she hoped to acquire taste by making her ideas undergo that sort of ordeal and almost of torment. In fact, she would have liked, not, as she said, to repair her mind and make it quite new, but to combine two minds, to wed so to say the spirit of her canton with ours. Unfortunately the graft always remained rebellious, and was only very imperfectly successful. The result was something forced and twisted. She could hardly say anything without overdoing the natural idea or the expression, by seeking some unusual connection. It is curious to see how far she carried and how far those around her carried this principle of error ; for I do not except M. Necker, who edited the five volumes of his wife's posthumous *Mélanges*, and seemed to approve of them in every way.

When we open Mme Necker's *Mélanges* after reading some work of the seventeenth century, we seem to enter into a quite new world, and to meet with a different language. *She did not task herself*, somebody said to express Mme de Caylus' style of writing and her delightful carelessness. We can certainly not say the same thing on reading Mme Necker's writings. At the very beginning I find this thought, for example : 'We must not only acquit ourselves of our particular duties, but we must also *acquit ourselves of our talents and of our circumstances* towards our conscience and society.' *To acquit oneself of one's talents* is ingenious and new, and easy to understand ; but *to acquit oneself of one's circumstances*, meaning : *to do one's duty in a great position and with a great fortune*, that is not so easily understood. A little further, I read this other thought :

'I know some metaphysical minds to whom I shall never speak of the beauties of nature ; they have long surmounted the *intermediary ideas* which bind sensations with thoughts, and their mind is so much occupied with abstractions that we cannot make them share the enjoyments which always suppose the *relations of the soul with real and external objects*.

'Nor must we describe to them particular manners: always speak to them *with a speaking-trumpet at the extremity of the chain*, and never attempt to make them pass *from link to link*.'

What a laborious simile! and what need to bring in the *speaking-trumpet*? and then always these *relations*; this word *relations (rapports)* continually turns up in her language. We see here that same abuse of abstraction which she speaks of and censures in others. The expression *chain of ideas* is also familiar to her: we might think that she is constantly aware of the weight of it.—At every moment we find comparisons occurring under her pen which, instead of elucidating the already obscure and enigmatic thought, have the effect of obscuring it still more; the glimpse of light that we have caught vanishes. A few of her comparisons are extremely quaint. Wishing to define, for example, those people without any unity in their character and their sensibility, and who spread themselves in all directions as if they had several different souls, she says 'that they are like *cray-fish* who can lose a claw without appearing any the worse a few days after, because they have several centres of sensibility. Elsewhere, the natural impression of the comparison she uses is just the reverse of her thought. Thus she says: 'To try to restrain genius within the limits of taste is not an impossible thing. *Look at the Dutch*, they make a dike with straws to keep out the sea.' The work of the Dutch in keeping out the sea with dikes is great and industrious, but is by no means in harmony with the idea that is called up by the word taste; a comparison of that kind baffles the mind, instead of elucidating thought. This kind of discord is perpetual in Mme Necker. She is fond of mythological comparisons and fetches them from afar. In a eulogy of her husband, and to explain that his existence has become inseparable from the public weal, she says: 'It is *Meleager's fire-brand* to which his ministerial life is attached.' This *Meleager's fire brand* occurs in several places. In a word, we are too aware that the comparisons, in this woman of intellect, do not come spontaneously, that they do not spring up under her steps and from the heart of the subject she treats of, that they are not inspired by the appositeness of the language, but that they are drawn from some older store-house, from some conversa-

tion copy-book where she had them in reserve. So they astonish before anything else and give no light. That is the fault.

It would be unjust not to recognise at the same time her natural qualities, and those which distinguish her from the other women in that age of corruption and false sensibility. Hers rings true; it is derived from the purest moral sources, and whenever she is elevated we derive pleasure and profit from listening to her. We could imagine that she was thinking of Mme de Lambert and that she remembered having read her when she said: 'Happy is he who has never found pleasure except in movements of sensibility and reason! he will be sure to find amusement all his life.' If she is a little too much infected by the taste for things intellectual and the propensity to analyse, which is the malady of the time, she breaks away from it by a higher inspiration, which dominates the errors of taste: '*The present moment and Every one for himself*, those, she said, are the two mottoes of the age; one is contained in the other. *The future and To live in others*, these are the mottoes I should like to adopt.' She early began to think of the decline of life and of the time when external charms begin to fade. Taking stock of her wealth from a moral point of view: 'I have reduced them, she says, to *religious* ideas and those of the *feelings*, in order that advancing time may only increase my fortune.' Every day adds to her dislike of the great world, where everything appears factitious and her heart finds so little sustenance. She then returns to the past, where she loves to live again. Though she feels at once what she misses in Paris, she rightly judges that residence in the capital soon becomes indispensable to those who have once tasted it: 'It is certain, she writes, that one can and must be happier elsewhere, but in order to find that happiness it is necessary not to have known an enchantment which, though it does not give happiness, poisons for ever every other kind of life.' When writing these words, she was still half under the spell (1773). Her husband's first ministry, which must no doubt have exalted her, was also the moment of her first disillusionment: 'My heart and my regrets, she wrote to a friend in July 1779, incessantly seek a universe where beneficence is the first of virtues. What reflexions on our own fate

do I not make ! I expected to see the golden age under so pure an administration ; I see only the iron age ; everything resolves itself into doing the least possible amount of mischief.' So from this moment she is seized with regret for the past : ' Regret for the past, she exclaims, always turns my eyes to that Being for whom no time is past. I think I see Him surrounded by all our hours, and I seek at His side both the moments and the persons who seem to exist no longer for us : then my soul is calmed ; my erring and desolate thought finds a refuge.' She had not, like so many other women, any regret for fleeting youth and vanishing beauty. One day however (she was just thirty-five years of age), she gives vent to something like a slight lament : ' I find it very difficult, she writes to a friend, to accustom myself to all changes ; age, which seems to approach so slowly, has taken me by surprise just by this noiseless approach ; I imagine myself in a new world, and I know not if the moment of my youth was a dream, or whether the dream is commencing at the present moment.' But soon her mind is made up, and the resources of mature age are all prepared : ' Having had tastes in my youth which were very different from those which occupy me at present, I have been little sensible of the passage ; it has occurred by degrees, and I have always found substitutes. So, when I see my faded complexion and my sunken eyes in the glass, and when looking into myself I find a stronger and more active reason, if time had not robbed me of the objects of an affection which will end only with my life, I should not know whether to complain of it or not.'

The first ministry of her husband or her *friend*, as she called him less familiarly, provided her with an opportunity to develope and exercise her virtues on a large scale. At this period of 1778, the treatment of the sick in the hospitals was far from satisfactory ; it is enough to say that they lay more than one in a bed, and Mme Necker's hospital was originally founded with a view to 'proving the possibility of tending the patients *alone in a bed* with all the attentions of the tenderest humanity, and without exceeding a certain fixed price.' The trial was made in a little hospital of only a hundred and twenty beds. Mme Necker, the foundress, remained for ten years the directress and the watchful steward. She deserved the share



of praise which M. Necker publicly gave her in his *Compte-rendu* to the King in January 1781. Although mundane malice could cavil at this solemn praise of a wife by her husband, in this case, I must say that the smile dies away in presence of the elevation of the end and the greatness of the benefit.

I have no need to follow her in the details of her life and her different travels, most of which were undertaken for the good of her health, undermined by the nervous anxieties which marked the labour of her soul. Duties, the conventions of the great world, a perpetual watchfulness exercised over herself and around her, a sensibility which was contained and often suppressed in silence and with pain, all this contributed to wear out Mme Necker prematurely. Two great friendships dominate her life, next to her worship of her husband. The highest of these friendships, which also resembled a cultus, was that which attached her to M. de Buffon, whom she will help us more than anybody to know and appreciate from the intimate and still elevated sides of his character, for she was not the woman ever to enter into any familiarities with those she admired. Her other great friendship was for Thomas, that estimable and moral writer, whom it has become fashionable to scoff at, but who had some distinguished literary talents and some touching qualities of the heart :

'We were united in our youth by all honest relations, Mme Necker wrote to him (1778), and never did a less pure idea tarnish our friendship. Let us still be friends now that mature age, whilst diminishing the vivacity of our inclinations, increases the force of habits, and let us still be necessary to one another now that we live only in the past and the future ; for, for my part, I expect no advantage from the approval of the new societies of our old age, and I desire nothing in posterity but a grave to which I shall precede M. Necker, and for which you shall write the inscription : that will be a sweeter shelter for me than the poplars that cover Rousseau's ashes.'

Such thoughts coming from the heart are well calculated to redeem and pardon the exaggerations of a few pages.

Mme Necker's daughter, who was afterwards the celebrated Mme de Staël, was already growing up and outpacing her. As lively and impetuous as her mother was

contained and discreet, responsive to every breath of the age, and possessed of a genius which was to venture on many paths, she caused astonishment and uneasiness in this staid mother, and suggested this involuntary thought : ' Children ordinarily show little gratitude for our solitudes : they are like young branches that are impatient of the trunk to which they are attached, and never think that they would wither if they were cut away.' M. Necker, in the intervals of his serious affairs, enjoyed his daughter's sallies, and took a pleasure in provoking them. It was said that Mme Necker was pained by this preference, and that the wife in her was more vulnerable than the mother was vainglorious.

The events of M. Necker's second Ministry greatly exceeded her, and whenever there was any occasion for hesitation, she was on the side of retreat. So it was a comfort to her, in the midst of so many causes for grief, to find herself in 1790 back at Lausanne or Coppet, in sight of her beautiful lake, and not far from her parents' graves : ' It seems, she said at every return, interpreting the moral feelings inspired by this landscape nature, it seems as if the Supreme Being had concerned himself more particularly with His creatures in this place, and that He obliges them ever to raise their thoughts to Him.' In these final years, and whilst the year '93 was spreading its horrors over France, she wrote a pathetic little work, which found favour even with those who were most severe on Mme Necker's mental direction, I mean her *Réflexions sur la Divorce*, which appeared on the morrow of her death. In this writing, which was traced with an already failing hand, Mme Necker proposes to combat the French law of divorce and to show how incompatible it is with the principal ends of nature in society and of morality. Strong in her own example, in her virtues and the religion of her whole life, she pleads for the indissolubility of the marriage tie ; she cannot conceive how a fundamental institution can be thus delivered to the mercy of human caprices and attractions : ' For the first attraction of youth, she says, is but a first band which supports two plants newly brought together until, having taken root one beside the other, they live henceforth on the same substance.'— ' In mature age, she thought with delicate feeling, the woman who should please most is she who has devoted

her youth to us.' Without following her through her train of reasoning, I will only point out a few thoughts of a penetrating morality. Describing the happiness of a faithful couple, and especially that of the father who, seeing himself living again in his children's features, reads in them his wife's chastity, the truth of her emotion leads her to the most perfect expression and colouring: 'Sometimes even, a tenderly loved husband sees only himself in his children's features. Nature, who thus becomes the guarantee and the interpreter of conjugal love, delights in consecrating with her inimitable brush the chaste feelings of a faithful wife; and all the glances which a tender father casts on the sons who are like him, return to the mother with a new sweetness.' These are charming thoughts and rendered after nature. At the same time Mme Necker falls again into some of her old faults. She makes excessive use of mythological comparisons, of historical examples, of Meleager, of Aria, of Pætus. She inappropriately brings Henri IV into Rubens' picture representing the confinement of Marie de Médicis. Henri IV and Marie de Médicis are an unfortunate example to call up in illustration of love and conjugal fidelity. With her there is always the same want of tact in associating ideas and harmonising shades in comparisons. But these defects are here more easily redeemed than elsewhere: the subject inspires her; she is elevated, she is ingenious; and when she comes to the consideration of marriage in old age, to that last goal of comfort and sometimes also of happiness in that disinherited age, she has some fine and powerful words: '*The happiness or the unhappiness of old age is often only the extract of our past life.*' Describing, from the experience of her heart and her ideal, the last happiness of a married couple

*Quis s'aiment jusqu'au bout malgré l'effort des ans,*

she draws the picture and reveals the secret of her own destiny; one should read the whole of this truly charming page:

'Two married people who are attached to one another mark the periods of their long life by pledges of virtue and mutual affection; they fortify themselves with the past, and make it a rampart against the attacks of the present. Ah! who could

bear to be cast alone upon this unknown shore of old age ? Our tastes are changed, our thoughts are weakened, the testimony and affection of another are the only proofs of the continuity of our existence ; feeling alone teaches us to know ourselves ; it commands time to lighten for a moment its ruling hand. Thus, far from regretting the world that flees from us, we flee it in our turn ; we escape from interests which no longer affect us ; our thoughts grow like the shadows at the approach of night, and a last ray of love, which is no other than a divine ray, seems to form the gradual transition between the purest feelings that we can experience on earth to those which will penetrate us in heaven. Watch, great God, over the friend, over the only friend who will receive our last sighs, who will close our eyes and will not fear to give a farewell kiss to the lips faded by death !'

I desired to quote this singular example of a certain impressive and solemn eloquence, a very singular example indeed, when we think that it came out of the latter half of the eighteenth century, from the midst of that society which was a prey to dissoluteness, and that it comes from a person who lived in it for thirty years without being infected by it for a single moment. It means coming back to *Philemon and Baucis*, but coming back to them in the only manner then possible, through a certain declamation. This time at least it is very sincere ; it is confounded with eloquence, and at the close it is even something more, it is a prayer.

Mme Necker had uttered her swan-song ; she died in May 1794, in a house near Lausanne ; she was only fifty-four years of age. In a *Notice* written by her grandson we may read some touching particulars about her end. But, even outside of the domestic circle, Mme Necker deserves in our literature a more distinct memory and rank than has been generally granted her hitherto. France owes her *Mme de Staël*, and that magnificent gift has made us forget the rest. Mme Necker, with faults which offend at first sight, and at which it is easy to raise a smile of disdain, has an inspiration of her own, a character. Having entered Parisian society with the fixed purpose of becoming an intellectual woman and of coming into contact with intellectual people, she succeeded in preserving her moral conscience, in protesting against the false doctrines which overflowed on all sides, in preaching by example, in withdrawing to her duties in the heart of the

great world, and, to make up for a few too subtle ideas and a few affected phrases, in leaving behind her monuments of benevolence, a spotless memory, and even some eloquent pages. As to her daughter, although Mme Necker admired her, she would certainly have wished her very different, and it would be difficult to trace in her the influence of her mother. But this influence could be more easily found in other members of their posterity, and Mme Necker's form of intellect, softened, less rigid after the first generation, must have largely entered into the elevated, fundamentally moral and always eminent turn of ideas of an illustrious family.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A moralist-physiologist has said: 'Just as, after an evening's too assiduous labour, one has a thousand painful, plaguing, wearying ideas, which recur to us before going to sleep; but which, upon our wakening in the morning, are all cleared up, and become fresh, easy and vivid: so, from one generation to another, the forms of ideas which, in Mme Necker, are in a state of laborious and complicated preparation, and almost of a nightmare, awaken in Mme de Staël, young, brilliant and light.'

## THE ABBÉ MAURY <sup>1</sup>

Monday, June 23, 1851.

THE Abbé Maury was one of our most celebrated orators, and he may still be regarded as one of our most judicious and useful rhetoricians, taking the word rhetorician in the favourable sense of the Ancients. His *Essai sur l'Éloquence de la Chaire* is one of the best books that we possess in the didactic line. In spite of the title, and although it is always very difficult to speak of sermons, and the art of composing them, without tedium, the Abbé Maury is instructive without being tedious. It seems to me however that, generally speaking, the prevalent idea respecting the Abbé Maury as a writer and man of letters is not very clear, and that his character as a politician has left a more than equivocal impression upon our minds. It has occurred to me therefore, with the help of conversation with some sagacious men who knew him, to clear up my obscurities on the subject, and to give in a natural way the results of my curiosity. It cannot be a matter of indifference to make a close acquaintance with the man who was the antagonist and passed for the rival of Mirabeau.

His beginnings were poor and hard. Born in 1746 at Valréas in the Comtat-Venaissin, on Papal territory, he sprang from a family that was once Protestant, which left the Dauphiné at the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. One of his ancestors, a Calvinist, had even been a martyr in the wars of the Camisards, and Maury, afterwards threatened with the lantern, more than once had occasion to remember his hanged ancestor, whom he was not however zealous to imitate. It cannot be said that the young Maury had a natural vocation for the priesthood: considering certain qualities of energy, audacity and activity

<sup>1</sup> *Essay on Pulpit Eloquence*, by the Abbé Maury.

of which he gave proofs, he was perhaps better fitted for the military profession, and he himself readily admitted it. But circumstances commanded and left him no choice. Young Maury obtained his early education at the college of his native town, and from there was sent to the Seminary at Avignon. We are told of some happy repartees of his childhood and of some prodigious feats of memory : one day he learnt by heart a sermon of the Abbé Poulle, after hearing it once, and wrote it down after leaving the church. At nineteen, fired with ambition and full of confidence in his powers, Maury declared to his parents that he wished to go to Paris to try his fortune. He departed then with eighteen francs in his pocket. He travelled as he best could with such a slender stock of money. It is related that on leaving Avalon he met two other young men who were equally short of funds, but who were just as confident as himself. One was Treilhard, the future jurist and compiler of the Civil Code ; the other was Portal, the future Court physician. They confided to each other their hopes, their fable of the *Milk-pail*, which was not a fable in their cases. The one, the physician, was going to be a member of the Academy of Sciences ; the other, the lawyer, was going to be Advocate-general ; and the Abbé already saw himself a Court preacher. Having reached the heights overlooking Paris, they heard a clock strike ; it was the big bell of the Cathedral. 'Do you hear that bell ?' said Treilhard to Maury, it says that you shall be Archbishop of Paris.—'Probably when you are a Minister,' replied Maury.—'And what am I going to be ?' exclaimed Portal.—'What are you going to be ?' replied the other two : that difficulty is soon got over ; you will be first Court physician.' It is Pariset who records this anecdote in his Eulogy of Portal ; others have laid the scene of it outside Auxerre. This is one of those tales which, if not true, are well invented, and which sum up the destiny of a man in a piquant manner. But why not at once add the whole prediction in Maury's case : Yes, you will be Archbishop or deputy to the Archbishop of Paris ; but that high office will just be your stumbling-block and your disgrace, the public mark of your degradation and your fall.

The libellers who attacked Maury, after he had attained celebrity, ignobly searched the years of his youth and the

first circumstances of his sojourn in Paris. Morals were at all times his weak side ; his passions were violent and anything but ideal, and his familiar talk was too often in keeping. But his organisation, even in its fiery impetuosity, was never to be turned aside from the obstinate labour which was to lead him to his goal : ' This author is a proof, said La Harpe (his rival), of what obstinate labour and the strength of organs are able to do. . . . He was born with wit, and, rising every morning at five o'clock and studying till evening, he had acquired literary knowledge. As yet however he earned his livelihood by giving private lessons in Latin and geography, and by correcting printers' proofs. A *Eulogy of Fénelon* that he sent to the Academy in 1771, and which won the accessit, began at length to bring him into notice.' It was in the same competition for a Eulogy of Fénelon that La Harpe obtained the prize. The Abbé Maury was at this time only twenty-five years of age, and not forty, as La Harpe supposes, who tries to make out that his talent consisted in perseverance and labour.

This *Eulogy of Fénelon*, by the Abbé Maury, is marked with the cachet of the time. We see from it in the first place that the life of the Archbishop of Cambrai combined all that may interest a *feeling heart*, talents, virtues and *misfortunes* ! The author asks himself this question : What was religion to Fénelon ? And he answers it as one might answer it in 1771, speaking before an Academy more than half composed of philosophers or men of the world imbued with philosophical ideas. Christianity is presented and insinuated as it were as a *sublime philosophy* ; it is the *philosophy of misfortune*. Later, when touching up this Eulogy at that same passage and at several others, it is curious to see how the author sets about correcting the details of these weak and half worldly passages. God, who was only a *father* in the first version, becomes in the second a *father* and a *judge* ; the poor, who were at first *creditors* and *judges*, become after reflexion only *creditors* and *mediators* with God. The Christian religion, which was at first only the religion *that alone knows the art of comforting*, became besides the religion *that never deceives man*. Having occasion to speak of the *Directions for the Conscience of a King*, written by Fénelon for the Duke of Burgundy, the Abbé Maury did not at



first dare, in presence of the Academy, to clearly define confession and the confessional; he said vaguely: 'It is no longer a child, it is a Christian he is addressing. In what position will he place his pupil? He calls him to that moment of truth when man, prostrate before *a tribunal*, denounces himself to his judge.' But, in the corrected text, we read, in a definition that is more becoming to a prelate, a prince of the Church, and more conformable with the Catechism: 'He calls him to *that moment of truth, of repentance and mercy*, when man, prostrate before *the sacred tribunal*, denounces himself to *his judge*, who *immediately becomes his charitable mediator*, etc., etc.' I know not whether that is much better from the oratorical point of view, but I wish to point out in what manner the Abbé Maury afterwards succeeded in imparting to this Eulogy, and in general to all his early works, on revising them, a thin stratum of orthodoxy. It was in fact in the pure Christian spirit, in that ardent and sincere inspiration, it was in the matter of faith that they were wanting; and this defect is still perceptible even in their compositeness and their final accuracy.

Judicious and sensible as he was, the Abbé Maury was as conscious of this defect as we are, even more so. Frankly approaching, in his *Essai sur l'Éloquence de la Chaire*, the causes of the decline of this branch of eloquence during the eighteenth century, he blames not so much the talent of the Christian orators as the unchristian use they made of their talents in courting the taste and spirit of the day, in departing from the direct sources of doctrine and faith and launching into themes of fashionable morality and beneficence. We should hear him speak on the subject with authority and conviction:

'The great subjects of this fine and solid Christian teaching, so well indicated by the Church in the annual order and the distribution of the Gospels; these subjects, so important, so fruitful, so rich in eloquence, without which morality, deprived of the support of a divine sanction and stripped of the avenging authority of a supreme Judge, is no more than an ideal theory and a purely arbitrary system that is adopted or rejected at will; these magnificent subjects, I say, were more or less thrust aside by the Christian orators who unfortunately wrote with that bad taste, and who, straying into new regions, renounced of their own accord the greatest advantages and the

most lawful rights of their ministry. Soon all was confusion in this kind of oratory, and corruption followed. They *could not sanctify philosophy : they secularised, so to say, religion.*

It was this same man however who, speaking not for the Academy, but in the pulpit, and preaching the Lenten sermon before the King in 1781, touched upon administration, politics, finances, so that Louis XVI said on leaving the chapel : ' It is a pity ! if the Abbé Maury had spoken a little about religion, his sermon would have been complete.'

But we are as yet only at the Abbé Maury's beginnings. The French Academy was wont, at that time, to celebrate the King's fête every year in the chapel of the Louvre, and to hear, on that occasion, a panegyric of Saint Louis. In 1772, this panegyric was delivered by the Abbé Maury, then only twenty-six years of age. It is very necessary to go back to the circumstances to explain the extraordinary success which this discourse gained. Not only did they applaud by clapping in the very chapel, but the Academy thought themselves called upon to send a deputation to the Cardinal who was charged with drawing up the list of livings, and to recommend the young Abbé. They especially admired the art with which the orator was able to *get over* the perilous passage of the Crusades : ' When reading the Panegyric of Saint Louis, delivered by the Abbé Maury before our illustrious Academy, wrote Voltaire, I thought, when I came to the article of the Crusades, I was listening to that *Cucupiedre* or Peter the Hermit, changed into a Demosthenes and a Cicero. He almost made us envious to see a crusade.' The movement by which the orator called up Saint Louis from the grave and made him rise up to justify himself before the assembly, this movement, considering the situation, certainly lacked neither justness nor eloquence. By the mouth of Maury Saint Louis for a moment made even those regret their raillery and irony who did not blush to insult the Maid every day.

At the same period (1772) Bossuet's *Sermons* were published for the first time, and the Abbé Maury had the very great merit of at once appreciating them at their true value, in spite of his century. Even La Harpe who, at this epoch, had read nothing of Bossuet except the *Oraisons Funèbres* and the *Histoire universelle*, opposed this

judgment of his Works as a whole, and only yielded some time after Maury boldly places Bossuet at the head of all the other sacred orators, even for his sermons ; he shows him to be at once the precursor in date and the master of Bourdaloue and Massillon. To Bourdaloue he assigns his true rank on account of the admirable arrangement of his plans, for the *beautiful and constant unity* of his subjects, for the perfect and Christian justness of his developments, always with a view to the sanctification of his hearers. With regard to Massillon, Maury, speaking of the much-vaunted *Petit Carême*, which he considers inferior to the *Grand*, the first *Carême*, presumes to utter the word *decline*, and he gives his reasons with great force and good sense. All these judgments, outlined by him in 1772 and 1777, which were then entirely new and original, and were since developed and brought into perfect light in the last editions of the *Essai sur l'Éloquence de la Chaire*, were henceforth authoritative on this literary and sacred matter. He said of Bossuet in 1772 :

'What gives most fulness and substance to Bossuet's Sermons, is the admirable use he makes of Holy Scripture. That is the inexhaustible mine in which he finds his proofs, his comparisons, his examples, his transitions and his images. . . . He blends the thoughts of Scripture so well with his own, that we might imagine he was creating them or at least they were purposely conceived for the use he makes of them. . . . In a sermon, indeed, everything should be drawn from Scripture, or at least should have the colouring of the sacred books ; that is 'the intention of religion, *that is even the teaching of good taste.*'

For all those qualities which I can only indicate in passing by reason of the gravity of the subject, the Abbé Maury deserves the most serious esteem, an esteem which will be accorded to him, as I do not fear to affirm, by anybody who, wishing to study our great pulpit orators, has occasion to verify his judgments, which are so sound, so substantial and so solid. I shall have by the way sufficient occasion to criticise him, not to be afraid of doing him the justice here which is fully his due.

Not losing sight of his career in the world, the Abbé Maury collected in 1777 his *Discours choisis sur divers Sujets de Religion et de Littérature*, and he qualified himself to solicit a seat in the French Academy. To that end he tried another means, a quite diplomatic contrivance,

that of reconciling the Gluckists and the Piccinists, the partisans of the two kinds of music; this would have secured him the votes of the two parties. It was not however until a few years later (1785) that he attained his purpose. Grimm acknowledged that at this time there were few Christian orators who appeared more worthy of the Academy's choice, and he added: 'There are very few no doubt who would be less misplaced in an assembly of philosophers.' The praise might seem compromising, if the Abbé Maury had been capable of being compromised on any point.

During this first part of his career, before the Revolution, the Abbé Maury was in fact no more than a man of wit and talent, generally hiding in society the superior man he promised to be behind the pleasant fellow, the gay companion who was able to tell a good story, a spicy story that savoured more of Friar Jean des Entommeures than of the panegyrist of Saint Vincent de Paul or Saint Louis<sup>1</sup>; lively, ardent, vehement by nature, on the whole a good-natured man and dear to his friends. A familiar letter to Dureau de La Malle, which may be seen in the National Library, gives one a very good idea of his tone when writing to a friend. We find in it more plain-speaking and high spirits than delicacy. The letter was written from Paris to Dureau de La Malle who was then in Anjou (December 9, 1778). Here are a few passages:

'Since your departure I have been spending two months in Normandy with the Abbé de Boismonst; I have seen the camp and the sea, two very new and very interesting sights to me. If I had written to you during my stay with the army, I might have talked to you like a regular *garrisonier* about close order and open order; but my head has now cooled on tactics, and I am left only with a few observations which may be useful in my *trade* on a class of men I did not know, and whose ways deserve to be studied.

'I never preach before Advent. *That means so much less*

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the Abbé's stories or humorous remarks can only be whispered. Here is one of the more harmless trifles, which I have at first hand. One day, after preaching a sermon in a convent, one of the nuns remarked to him in her simplicity that he appeared much moved, and that she could see by his trembling when he began to speak how much he was affected. 'Oh! you must not be concerned about my trembling, he said; you see I shake my square cap with my thumb like this (making the movement).'

*trouble* and so much more leisure to write, instead of taking *useless pains* by devoting myself to *mere memory work*. I am preparing four new Discourses for the coming Lent, and, in spite of all my fastidiousness, I confess to you that I am sometimes tempted to be satisfied with my latest productions; but nobody knows them, and paternal indulgence may very well delude me in my solitude. If you were in Paris, I might test my oratorical verve on your *susceptible* and delicate soul, and your good taste might determine my judgment of it. I do not dare to bore my friends with the reading of them; I should really scruple to make them undergo such drudgery, and you are the only man in the world that has the courage and the kindness to listen to a sermon outside of church.'

. Whilst making allowance for that freedom and offhand manner in which a man speaks of himself, how conscious we are that the whole thing is for him only a *trade*!

There follow a few details on digestion; then some words of praise on the translation of Tacitus which Dureau was then preparing; news of Paris and literature; an account of La Harpe's mishaps and his thousand journalistic squabbles: 'Since I am in the vein, adds the Abbé Maury, *may the devil take the confounded clumsy fellow* who nearly killed or at least disfigured my little Adolphe,' (one of Dureau's sons who had had some accident). We see the tone. Maury excuses himself besides for a little advice he gives on the subject of spoiled children: 'Do not do your eldest this ill service, and excuse the preaching Ragotin, the highway predicant, who presumes to open his heart to you without any reserve.'

This Abbé de Boismont, to whom the Abbé de Maury had paid a visit in Normandy, was a holder of rich livings and an Academician besides. The Abbé Maury had hopes of his resigning some living in his favour, and, seeing him so infirm, he also had an idea of succeeding him in the Academy. One day when he was questioning him a little too closely on his life and the circumstances of his past, the Abbé de Boismont said to him: 'Abbé, you are taking my measure for a Eulogy.' It was not the Abbé de Boismont however, but Le Franc de Pompignan, that Maury succeeded. Some portions of his reception address were lauded; but what appeared to everybody an intolerable novelty and an enormity of the worst taste, was his daring to say, when summing up the principal writings of his predecessor and the events of his life: 'Such, Gentlemen,

is the picture presented by the life of the justly celebrated writer who to-day *enters into posterity!* *Enters into posterity!* Grimm, La Harpe, all protested loudly; an epigram was written to consecrate the insolence of the expression. Now it has become common.

At this date of 1787, the Abbé Maury, who was more than forty years of age, gifted with an active and robust talent, and strong faculties, equal to any task, and with a great power of application, was seeking an outlet for his talents in the direction of politics, which were beginning to stir all minds. He became very intimate with M. de Lamoignon, Keeper of the Seals, and served him with his advice and his pen in his bold plans of reform, relatively to the judicial bodies and the Parliaments. The Abbé Maury was not indeed at this time the man who would be satisfied with devoting himself purely to the ministry of the Christian word: he had neither faith nor charity enough to sow in such ungrateful soil, and to enter into a conflict with all the minds of the age. In that sphere a few first successes had sufficed to establish his reputation, and he turned his attentions elsewhere. Nor was he the man to devote himself to the composition of some great literary work; he did not feel that need of perfection and deep study which, to certain solitary and charmed minds, makes years to pass like hours. He was quick at grasping everything, he divined what he did not know, he was firm and decided when necessary, happy and quick in his replies, resolute and imperious in his assertions, bold in bearing as in speech, and with none of that native modesty which some honest and scrupulous men are never able to throw off. His good judgment asserted itself and kept on its way as it best could through all his sallies, his levities and outbursts of petulance. He loved argument, he remained self-possessed and quickly gained an advantage over an adversary. In all things, he loved the great subjects, the subjects that have body and grip; he loved the high roads, sure as he was, with his robustness of mind and his numerous powers of exposition, to dominate the crowd and to hold his own. We see that the Abbé Maury was something more than a Christian preacher, and that he had great pre-dispositions to be a political speaker when the Revolution commenced.

It must be acknowledged to his honour that he did not

hesitate in his choice of a camp, and that he made up his mind from the very first. Marmontel related a conversation that he had with Chamfort at the time of the convocation of the States General. Chamfort openly declared all his ideas, all his hopes of a levelling of the *ancien régime* and of a complete renovation of society. Marmontel communicated this conversation to the Abbé Maury the same evening : ' It is only too true, replied the latter, that they are not much mistaken in their speculations, and that the faction has chosen its time well for meeting with few obstacles. I have observed the two parties. I have made up my mind to perish in the breach ; but I have none the less the melancholy certainty that they will take the place by assault, and that it will be pillaged.'

The Abbé Maury felt however little calling for martyrdom, even for political martyrdom. He had a few slight attacks of caution at the opening of the Constituent Assembly. He spoke little in the Chamber of the Clergy, and manifested, as we are told by the Abbé de Pradt, some timidity. He even tried to quit the Assembly after the 14 July, and was arrested at Péronne ' without his band, without a cockade at the moment when he was asking his way across country.' After the events of the 5 and 6 October, it appears that he still had some idea of flight. But he soon hardened himself, he warmed to the fight and even took a delight in it, and his temperament, his whole person and his talent properly speaking, found itself in all its element.

Once engaged in the struggle, the Abbé Maury did not hesitate any more. He was faithful to his party ; and, since I have to note so many blemishes and so many ugly sides, I am glad here to record a fact that is to his credit, which I find in the papers of Mallet du Pan : ' The Abbé Maury had an income of forty thousand francs, says M. Mallet (forty thousand francs income derived from livings), and gave every year twenty-five thousand to his family. The Mirabeaus and others offered him a hundred thousand crowns if he would pledge himself never to speak on assignats, on finances, or on the executive power. He was left free to defend the clergy. He had the virtue to refuse.' The *virtue*, do you understand ? ' Such a word is not to be passed over when we find it applied to the Abbé Maury. Let us return to his talents.

When one tries to-day to read the collection of the speeches delivered by the Abbé Maury in the Constituent Assembly, one is greatly disappointed. Almost all that talent, indeed, which he displayed in this second and brilliant part of his career, all that verve, that fine provoking humour, have perished. Among a great mass of redundant matter and of a precocious and undigested learning, just sufficient for the moment in the tribune, there remain no more, I say, than some tolerably coherent and vigorous reasoning, some portions which still show some good sense, and others which can never have been sincere. Is Maury, a man of the eighteenth century, sincere when, during the very first months of the Assembly (23 December 1789), he opposes the admissibility of actors and Jews to the rights of citizens, and classes them, in his enumeration, with the *executor of high justice (the executioner)*? But he is certainly in his right senses, when in the sitting on the evening of the 19 June (1790), a series of thoughtless motions having rapidly succeeded one another against Louis XIV's statue on the Place des Victoires, against the titles of nobility and simple estate names, and all in the name of the Noailles, the Montmorencys, all those who afterwards uttered their solemn *Mea culpa*, he, the Abbé Maury, ascends the tribune, ingeniously vindicates Louis XIV, and answers all those nobles who are ambitious to abolish themselves, with these words of an ancient to an arrogant philosopher: '*Thou treadest all these pomps underfoot, but with still more pomp.*'

On these, the best, occasions, the Abbé Maury really spoke impromptu. Coming late to one of these evening sittings, when some quite unexpected subject was under discussion, he has been known to be called upon suddenly by his friends, who shouted to him at his entrance: 'Come, Abbé, as usual you are absent, and see what they are going to pass!' he has been known, after having been informed in a few words of the subject in question, to cross the house, mount the tribune, and there win one of his great triumphs.

In order to understand the Abbé Maury's style of political eloquence, it is not as a rule enough to read the shreds of speeches which have been preserved, one must have the key to them, and this the Marquis de Ferrières gives us, or at least indicates, in a passage of his *Memoirs*. Thus, in



the discussion on the decree respecting the oath of the clergy, which the opposition of the bishops made inevitable, the tactics of the Abbé Maury, when he rose to speak in the sitting of the 28 November 1790, consisted entirely in having himself interrupted by the left side, in raising murmurs and clamours in order to be able to allege violence :

'Alexandre Lameth, says the Marquis de Ferrières, was in the chair ; during the discussion he maintained the greatest calm and the profoundest silence. In vain did the Abbé Maury try to cause an interruption, he interrupted himself, he complained that he could not obtain a hearing ; in vain did he abandon and resume the principal theme of his discourse, and lose himself in the most irrelevant digressions, in vain did he call upon Mirabeau in person and throw down the gauntlet of speech to him twenty times ; at the slightest movement of impatience that arose in the Assembly, Alexandre Lameth would say with a desperate sang-froid ; "One moment, Monsieur l'Abbé, I have promised to let you speak, and I will keep my promise." And, turning to the interrupters, he said "Gentlemen, listen to Monsieur l'Abbé Maury : he has the word ; I will not allow him to be interrupted."'

Having thus explained at length all this play of the stage and the side-wings, Ferrières concludes as follows : 'After two full hours of digressions, now eloquent, now wearisome, the Abbé Maury came down from the tribune, furious at not having been turned out of it, and so beside himself with anger, that he had even forgotten to conclude.' Now, when we read in the Abbé Maury's works, or even in the *Histoire parlementaire* of MM. Buchez and Roux, the speech with the indications of the interruptions, it is impossible, if we read it as it stands and without previous instruction, to seize the spirit of the drama.

But in many cases the Abbé Maury's tactics are more bare-faced. Apropos of the decrees which were called forth by the resistance of the clergy to the civil Constitution, seeing some of his friends trying to oppose them : 'Leave them alone, the Abbé called out repeatedly, we like their decrees, *we want three or four more of them.*' If in this case he said what he should not have done, his aggressive, provoking, irritating speech very often retaliated by snatching from the left side secrets which their leaders would have liked to conceal. Another and more

serious effect sometimes produced by this excessive partisanship was to drive more strongly to the left side men who might have been rallied and reconciled to his cause by greater moderation. A few members of the minority of the nobles desired at one time to sever their connection with the left side, and rejoin the majority of their order, 'It only remains to us to throw ourselves into your arms,' said the Marquis de Gouy-d'Arcy to several nobles in the Abbé's presence.—'You mean *at our feet*,' replied the latter dryly.

This kind of repartee, which never failed him, was often prompted merely by good humour and high spirits, as when Mirabeau said to him from the tribune, apropos of some false argument, that he would enclose him in a *vicious circle*: 'You are going to embrace me then?' replied Maury from his seat.—As with all those who are given to say these humorous things, I think that many have been wrongly attributed to him.

With the people, the outside populace who, once they knew him well, did not so much threaten as tease and provoke him, the Abbé's language was equally gay and free, and even descended to billingsgate. The smartest of his things to the old women of the Terrasse des Feuillants might have been said by a Roquelaure or by the Shrove-tide masqueraders returning from La Courtille; but they are things that cannot be written down. Every one knows his famous mot to the crowd which shouted as he passed: *A la lanterne!*—'Well! and when you have hanged me to the lantern, will you see any clearer?'—And when a man threatened to send him *to say mass to all the devils*, he drew a pair of pistols from his pocket, which he carried as a matter of precaution, and said: 'Look, here are two cruets (*jeux burettes*) to use in the service!' The people applauded these sallies, and the Abbé Maury obtained the vogue of an actor who plays his part well. A bon mot, said the Abbé de Pradt, was as good as a month's security to him.

Be this as it may, seen from a distance, these proofs of a presence of mind and courage which were seconded by such a stubbornness of conduct in the Assembly itself and by such a show of resistance, the brilliancy of certain speeches in which good sense and party spirit combined to form a specious fabric, the order, the breadth, the imposing ad-

vance of a practised and ever ready flow of speech, all this had won for the Abbé Maury, at the close of the Constituant Assembly, an immense reputation in Europe, and there was no lack of sovereigns who regarded him at once as a statesman and a man of honour. The Court of Rome, in particular, saw in this defender of the altar and the throne a hero and almost a saint escaped from martyrdom, and, on his leaving France in 1792, the Abbé Maury was loaded by Pope Pius VI with all the honours and dignities to which a Churchman could aspire: Nuntio, Archbishop, and soon Cardinal (1794). This excess of greatness was his rock, and his faults or, to call them by their right name, his vices, showed up more visibly in the purple.

Cardinal Maury had several of the seven deadly sins, gluttony, avarice, and something besides.<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Pacca recalls a pasquinade which was current in Rome at the time of his nomination, in which he is depicted *as a fox in danger, clever at winding*. I know not if Maury, in spite of his plottings, had that crafty, prudent shrewdness, and he was, I imagine, rather the man to aim straight for his interests and his appetites. It may be believed that this residence in Italy contributed to his corruption.<sup>2</sup> Confined for several years to his little bishopric of Monte-

<sup>1</sup> I find my idea fully expressed in these forcible words: 'Mirabeau, Maury, de mœurs égales, deux taureaux.'

<sup>2</sup> One of the best epigrams of the poet Le Brun is directed at the Abbé Maury; it is piquant in that, from beginning to end, it has a deceptive appearance of eulogy or apology, and that the reader is forced as it were to be his own epigrammatist by contradicting each line; in this case the satirist has to count on the complicity of his readers.

• L'Abbé Maury n'a point l'air impudent;  
L'Abbé Maury n'a point le ton pédant;  
L'Abbé Maury n'est point homme d'intrigue;  
L'Abbé Maury n'aime l'or ni la brigue;  
L'Abbé Maury n'est point un envieux;  
L'Abbé Maury n'est point un ennuyeux;  
L'Abbé Maury n'est cautelux ni traître;  
L'Abbé Maury n'est point un mauvais prêtre;  
L'Abbé Maury du mal n'a jamais ri:  
Dieu soit en aide au bon Abbé Maury!

These counter-truths do not however all equally leap to the eyes, and one who has just studied the Abbé Maury would hesitate about agreeing with several of the lines. *Envious* for example, and  *tedious*, that is not the impression I have formed of him from a distance. We may add that, in spite of Le Brun's attack, he was among the first of his colleagues at the Institute to attend his funeral.

fiascone, he lived too much by himself : vices are guests in us which in the course of years become the masters of the house, if we do not put them down in time and forcibly bring them to reason. The Abbé Maury had the disadvantages of a powerful organisation, full of needs, eager to consummate and enjoy. His was, if we may be permitted to say so, a superior mind and above all a superior talent in a gross nature. Such he appeared and declared himself in all eyes when, rallying to the Imperial Government, he returned to France and accepted during the imprisonment of Pius VII the administration of the archbishopric of Paris. I have no need to enter into the details and the ecclesiastical quarrels of this third and awkward part of his career. His reputation was wrecked, and his subsequent imprisonment hastened the end (1817). His defenders may prove as much as they please that there was no cause for confining him in the Château Saint-Ange or for getting up a case against him : I readily admit it. But, leaving aside the theological and canonical question, the moral question does not remain doubtful for a moment. Certainly it was not the part of Cardinal Maury, the hero of the *ancien régime*, who was in consequence loaded with the rewards of the Holy See, to serve the new power as a tool, and to do the work of a semi-constitutional bishop, during the imprisonment and oppression of the pontiff. He had not the delicacy to be conscious of this, just as he was insensible to so many other proprieties of his position and his profession. I might quote some piquant, incredible things, which have been told me by reliable witnesses, and which would sufficiently prove his avarice and the habitual licence of his talk. When I say I might quote them, I am wrong, for I could not write them down. His conversations were a table-talk of a strange savour. But I prefer to record a very curious conversation which Comte Joseph de Maistre had with Cardinal Maury at Venice in 1799, several points of which he noted down as singular.

The effect which Cardinal Maury produced on the Comte de Maistre no doubt answered very little to the latter's expectation, and he was struck at finding a person so celebrated and so highly considered in politics giving utterance to so many risky and unconsidered propositions, so many of those airy sayings and robust levities which fall back with all their weight upon the man who utters them.

He makes this very manifest in his note by a very delicate irony :

' On my visit to Venice, during the winter of 1799, writes the Comte de Maistre, I made acquaintance with the celebrated Cardinal Maury. On the first visit which I paid him, he spoke to me with interest about my embarrassing position, and always in the tone of a man who was able to put an end to it. In vain did I express much incredulity on the good fortune which he held out before me : *We will arrange that*, he said.

' A few days afterwards, I saw him at the house of the Baronne de Juliana, a French émigrée, who was holding a social gathering. He drew me aside into a window-recess ; I thought he was going to communicate to me some plan he had thought of for rescuing me from the abyss into which I was fallen.—He took from his pocket *three apples* which had just been given to him, and made me a present of them for the children.'

That was indeed the liberality of a miser, caught in the act ; it is a touch of the purest comedy.

' After seeing my wife and children once, continues M. de Maistre, he praised them so excessively that I was embarrassed. "*I never esteem by halves*," he said to me one day, speaking of myself.—I do not understand however, remarks M. de Maistre, why esteem should not be graduated like merit.

' On the 16 February (I have retained this date), he came to see me and spent a great part of the morning with me. In the evening I saw him again ; we spoke a long time on different subjects which he rapidly skimmed. I have retained several of his ideas, and give them word for word :

#### ' FRENCH ACADEMY : ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

' The French Academy (it is Cardinal Maury who is speaking) was alone held in consideration in France, and it really gave one a position. The Academy of Sciences was of no consequence in public opinion, no more was the Academy of Inscriptions. D'Alembert was ashamed to belong to the Academy of Sciences ; a mathematician, a chemist, etc., are only heard by a handful of people : the *littérateur*, the orator, address the universe. At the French Academy *we regarded the members of the Academy of Sciences as our VALETS*, etc.'

Maury was very fond of using these kinds of expressions, *valet*, *gredin*, in his conversation. A moment later he called one of the great dignitaries of the Maltese Order a *gredin* ; but, even leaving aside this term *valet*, all this outspoken doctrine on the absolute pre-eminence of the

French Academy appeared very strange to M. de Maistre, who knew with what names the Academy of Inscriptions and the Academy of Sciences were honoured. The conversation having come round to the chapter of languages, without troubling himself with the fact that his interlocutor was able to speak five languages and to read two others, Cardinal Maury said, still pushing on straight ahead of him :

‘ Languages are the knowledge of fools. I once took it into my head to learn English ; in three months I understood the prose-writers ; then, having made the experience that, in half an hour, I could read only twelve pages of Hume’s quarto History, while I could read forty in French in the same time, I dropped English.

‘ I have never looked into either a dictionary or a grammar.

‘ I learned Italian as one learns one’s own tongue, by listening : I conversed with everybody, I even preached boldly in my diocese ; but I should not be able to write a letter.’

And a moment later, trying to quote the last words of the dying Ganganelli in Latin, Cardinal Maury let slip a grammatical blunder, and M. de Maistre, who could not fail to perceive it, remarks that with such a system of studies it is not astonishing that he should have given syntax a slap in the face.

All the rest of the conversation is in the same tone. All that I wish to conclude from it, is that this impetuous and impromptu nature had been spoiled by indulging in an excessive opinionativeness, and that it never lost that habit of speaking on every subject and every occasion and *at any cost*, of taking things *in the gross* and being satisfied with the approximate, ready to clothe the whole in an oratorical drapery ; and in his familiar talk there was not even a shadow of any drapery. He continued to treat ideas as arbitrarily as he had formerly done his adversaries. It is remembered how one day, keeping his ground in the tribune in spite of the Duc de La Rochefoucauld who was trying to make him come down, he seized the Duke by the shoulders and made him execute three pirouettes. These pirouettes could be found again in his conversation when he saw himself face to face with an idea that embarrassed him.

Now, I hasten to say it, this is the same man (so contra-

dictory and variable is the human mind !) who, taking up again in these years his *Essai sur l'Éloquence de la Chaire*, corrected it, enlarged it, improved it, and brought it up to a degree of maturity and elegance that makes it one of the good books in the language, under the new and final form in which it reappeared (1810). Not only preachers, but all who have to speak in public, will find in it a number of just and shrewd, but especially just remarks, coming from a man of the profession, who speaks with authority of what he has practised and knows thoroughly. The author, when he again took up this estimable work, evidently recalled the industrious hours of his younger years, and repeated them with charm and with fruit. Everything is sensible, and there is no trace of ennui. The style is becomingly enlivened with quotations from the Ancients, without being overcharged. If the Abbé Maury has not in his details that ingenious fertility of metaphors and images which continually animates the language of criticism in Quintilian, he is by no means destitute of comparisons and similes. Thus in the chapter on *Oratorical Preparations*, in the whole section beginning : *Vous vous promenez seul à la campagne . . .*, he very well compares the unprepared flash of eloquence with the thunder-clap that suddenly breaks out in a serene sky. He never abuses Diderot's method, which consists in remaking in his own way what he criticises, but in his turn he uses the master's right in pointing out how to improve upon a thing. The plan he outlines of a Funeral Oration on Turenne, in opposition to Flechier's, has beauty and grandeur, and we feel that he might have carried it out. Some personal reminiscences, a few anecdotes appropriately introduced, relieve the continuity of his precepts without diverting one's attention from them. The master-pieces of the pulpit are presented, analysed on a large scale, and he does not neglect the particulars which may elucidate and set off some of their already unperceived effects. In Maury we first find Father Bridaine outlined in all his loftiness and his originality. But Maury did better than discover Father Bridaine, he restored to their proper rank Bossuet and Bourdaloue, the true classics of the pulpit. His Criticism of Massillon appeared severe ; it was bold at the time when he wrote it, but it was no more than just. In general, it is this justness, this solidity,

that strike me in Maury, in a matter that he thoroughly possesses. Do not expect great refinement, nor great novelty, nor lively curiosity ; but he is broad, he is full, he goes to the main point ; he understands disposing the architecture and the great avenues of the discourse ; he shows them like a master among masters. Bossuet was still easy, it seems to me, to grasp and to manifest, by reason of the flashes which signalise his progress ; but Bourdaloue, who is more even and more moderate, nobody has more admirably comprehended and defined than the Abbé Maury, in the beauty and the incomparable fertility of his designs and his plans, which seem to him *unique conceptions*, in that art, in that governing empire of the discourse, *in which he is unrivalled*, 'in that power of dialectic, that didactic and firm march, in that ever-growing strength, that exact and close logic, that *continued eloquence of reasoning*, in that *sureness* in fine and that *opulence of doctrine*.' He is inexhaustible in thus reproducing and expounding him in all his sound qualities. We feel that he is his ideal and his predilection. This deep understanding of Bourdaloue seems to me to be Maury's critical master-piece.

But, whilst Cardinal Maury's Treatise recommends to us these excellent things, is it necessary that his life and his example should again tell us more loudly that in order to be out and out eloquent, in order to be eloquent close by as well as at a distance, in order to obtain authority, even with less talent, in order to obtain a hearing for the great, brilliant or even merely useful things one says, there is no better means than to bring the man and the orator, the man and the author into perfect harmony, and, if you prefer to everything the word of Bourdaloue, to join to it its principal and prime source, I mean the moral life of a Bourdaloue ?



## THE DUC DE LAUZUN

*Monday, June 30, 1851.*

THERE have been two Lauzuns who both ran the same brilliant course, that of the *man who was a glass of fashion*: the Lauzun of the time of Louis XIV and the Lauzun of the reign of Louis XVI. At a distance one is apt, though without confounding them, to take their double fame into consideration, to see one within the other, and the splendour of the name has gained thereby. The mere name *Lauzun* implies everything that is most recherché and most supreme in the matter of elegance, of conceit and fashion. A short time ago I touched upon the other Lauzun when speaking of la Grande Mademoiselle, whom he had inspired with a great passion: he does not deserve a longer glance. But the Lauzun of Louis XVI's time, who was brought up on the knees of Mme de Pompadour and who died as Duc de Biron on the revolutionary scaffold, deserves a chapter to himself, and this chapter may not be as frivolous as one might think.

The Duc de Lauzun, besides, left *Memoirs*, and on that account he belongs by right to literature. A few years ago one would have hesitated seriously to take as one's text these *Memoirs*, which passed for a rather poor though most amusing book. After reading them again, I can confidently assert that, with the exception of the first pages, which exhibit some novelty and singularity, the reading quickly turns to a rather tedious uniformity. This series of gallant adventures recounted in the same tone, where inconstancy at times essays some false notes of sensibility, ends by arousing ennui, even disgust; the effect is sickening. These *Memoirs* of Lauzun cease to be more than an indifferently amusing book: Byron's *Don Juan* has put it into the shade. Since we can speak

of it as of a dead thing, and the poison has perished with the perfume, let us speak of it without any sympathy, without prudery, and as one of the most curious testimonies of the morals of an epoch which began by being frivolous and which ended by being bloody.

Armand-Louis de Gontaut-Biron, born in April 1747, lost his mother at his birth, and was brought up in the boudoir of Mme de Pompadour, of whom his father was one of the great courtiers. 'The difficulty of finding me a good governor induced my father, he says, to entrust this care to a lackey of my late mother, who could read and write passably, and who was adorned with the title of *valet de chambre*, in order to give him some consideration.' Observe the turn of wit and amusing irony already appearing: it is Lauzun's habitual tone. As a child he had masters of every kind, but he only had them when it suited his convenience. He continually read and wrote for Mme de Pompadour, who made use of his little accomplishments. His childhood was that of a pretty spoiled boy, that of a Chérubin. He read withal a great number of novels which did not help to steady his mind. As to his career, he was not allowed any time to think of it: 'At twelve years of age, he says, I was entered into the regiment of (French) Guards, of which the King promised me the reversion, and I knew, at that age, that I was destined to inherit an immense fortune and to occupy the finest position in the kingdom, without being obliged to take the trouble of being a good subject.'

At fourteen he began his career as a Richelieu and a Don Juan. His mother, who died in giving birth to him, was sister of the Duchesse de Choiseul, the wife of the Prime Minister. He was therefore quite at home in that world of the Choiseuls, of the Stainvilles, which was the scene of his first exploits, his first ravages. It was usual then to marry men of quality at a very early age. His father took the matter into his own hands and arranged his marriage with Mlle de Boufflers, granddaughter and heiress of the Maréchale de Luxembourg. The most delightful and the prettiest of the Boufflers and the most brilliant of the Birones, Lauzun contrived to turn it into an ill-assorted union. He took an aversion to the charming child at first sight, but married her nevertheless (4 February 1766); and one should see in what tone he speaks of

her in his Memoirs, in contradiction to the assertions of all contemporaries, who are unanimous in their admiration and praise of this sweet sacrificed girl.

To speak of Mme de Lauzun apropos of M. de Lauzun is the greatest vengeance one could take on the latter, and I shall not fail to do so. She was the same Amélie de Boufflers of whom Rousseau spoke so favourably in his *Confessions*, and whom he saw during his residence at Montmorency :

'Mme de Luxembourg, he says, brought with her on this visit (1760) her granddaughter, Mlle de Boufflers, now Mme la Duchesse de Lauzun. Her name was Amélie. She was a charming person. She had truly the face, the sweetness, the timidity of a virgin. Nothing could be more pleasing and more interesting than her face ; nothing more tender and chaste than the feelings she inspired. Besides, she was a child ; she was only eleven years of age. Mme la Maréchale, who thought her too bashful, did her best to animate her. She permitted me several times to give her a kiss ; which I did with my usual bashfulness. . . .'

Poor Jean-Jacques makes endless reflexions on this kiss, which disconcerted him no less than it did the poor little girl. Mme Du Deffand described this same graceful lady a few years later (20 February 1767) : '*La petite Lauzun* arrived. . . . The little woman is a little bird who has not yet learned any of the tunes that are whistled to her ; she utters a few little notes that end in nothing ; but, as she has a pretty plumage, she is admired, she is praised, without ceasing ; her bashfulness pleases, her little frightened air interests.' She adds indeed a few words of evil omen, which were not however verified. The amiable bird remained timid as ever, and marriage did not embolden her. As to *le petit Lauzun*, Mme Du Deffand saw him too. There was at that time at Paris a certain Lady Sarah Bunbury, one of the great ladies of her country, as well as one of the most original and most agreeable. Lauzun fell in love with her and was loved by her. She was supping one evening with Mme Du Deffand and sent him word. 'Although I had not been at *this* Mme Du Deffand's for five or six years, says Lauzun, I contrived to be taken by Mme de Luxembourg, who was supping there too.' It was there that the Lady Sarah, on rising

from supper, slipped a note into his hand which contained her confession in three words: *I love you*. . . Lauzun, who did not then know English, began to study it and some time after crossed over to England to join Lady Sarah. This Mme du Deffand of whom he speaks in such an off-hand way judged him very correctly in a letter she wrote at the time to Horace Walpole. She has just been speaking of the Duc de Choiseul:

'*Le petit Lauzun*, she adds, is not on good terms with him; . . . the Duke thinks his voyage absurd; he did not wish to entrust his despatches to him, and he has written to M. de Guerchy (the ambassador) to recommend him to keep a watch over his conduct. The grandmamma (the Duchesse de Choiseul) is rather fond of him. We supped with him a few days ago, and found him amusing enough. Pay him some attentions, but do not put yourself out in the least for him.'

We see that Mme Du Deffand was not to be outdone in disdain of the little Lauzun. She thought him *rather amusing*; that was indeed the turn of his wit. He thought himself more eccentric and extraordinary than he was; but he was droll, amusing, slightly sarcastic, excellent in semi-irony. Speaking of the war in Corsica (1768), in which he wished to take part, he said: 'A probability of being shot was *too precious to be neglected*; *I was not sufficiently in favour with all my relatives that they should be afraid of sending me to my death*.' When he ruined himself, speaking of the gossip in society and its attitude towards him, he characterises the behaviour of each: 'As to Mme la Duchesse de Grammont, she said *with moderation that I was a liar and a rogue*.' The force of this pleasantry, as we see, lies always in a certain disproportion between the beginning and the end of what is said, which appears to escape from the speaker, and takes one by surprise. Lauzun was delightful in catching and reproducing people's absurdities. When he departs for the war in America, he draws the general officers one after the other with very lively touches: the whole General Staff is taken off. On the occasion of a journey to the Palatinate, when he was very warmly received by a certain Baronne de Dalberg, he says amusingly: 'In foreign countries they love to show off what they have. The Baroness took me to a fête given by the Electress

Palatine, at Ockersheim, where she was not sorry to exhibit me, as well as a little light-bay horse with a white mane, that had been sent to her from Mecklenburg, and had arrived at the same time as I. We were both attentively examined.' Lauzun's wit was somewhat in the style of Grammont's. When seen and *read* to-day on paper, this kind of wit, though pleasing, appears rather thin : brilliantly wielded at the time by a handsome, brave, generous man, with grand manners, it showed to the best advantage, and turned people's heads.

And then it was not only the Duc de Lauzun's words, but his actions, that were extraordinary and captivated by their unexpectedness. Among the smartest was a trick he played upon a worthy fox-hunter who was aspiring to the hand of Miss Marianne Harland, a young, very dainty and more than mischievous English girl, who had taken a fancy for Lauzun. This big lover, Sir Marmaduke by name, had conceived a very gallant plan : ' The Ipswich races will be run in a fortnight, wrote Miss Marianne to Lauzun ; he has had a gold cup made that is heavier than myself, and is to be won by a horse that cost him two thousand louis.' He only asked the favour of laying the gold cup at the feet of his fair lady. What did Lauzun do ? He had some good race-horses in England, and he sent one of his best racers to Ipswich : ' A little jockey dressed in black followed out his instructions, modestly kept behind Sir Marmaduke's horse until within a hundred yards from the post, and then passed like a flash of lightning. The cup was given to him ; he presented it to Miss Marianne, after dropping into it a note that had been written beforehand, with these words : ' Sir Marmaduke having come a moment too late, permit me to carry out his intentions and to place this cup at your feet.' Miss Marianne recognised Lauzun's writing and said : *He is charming !* and all the women repeated the words after her.

In the war in Corsica, a rather piquant thing occurred which is characteristic of French ways at the time. Lauzun, who was serving as aide-de-camp, had turned the head of one Mme Chardon, the young and pretty wife of a commissary of stores, full of imagination and caprice. One day when a village quite near to Bastia was being besieged and attacked, the people had come out of the town to witness the affair as if it had been a play. Mme

Chardon was on horse-back and kept near the commanding officer, M. de Marbeuf. M. Chardon had been obliged to return to Bastia to organise an ambulance. Meanwhile there was a moment when the fight became hotter, and Lauzun was ordered to make a charge with a few dragoons. Mme Chardon wanted to follow and could not be prevented. She gaily faced the musket shots and returned pell-mell with the dragoons, after the desired object had been gained. But this is the essential feature : 'The whole army kept the secret of this charming piece of recklessness, with a discretion that could hardly have been expected of three or four persons.' They kept Mme Chardon's secret because she had been brave, and treated her as a comrade who must not be compromised. There was much of the old French delicacy in this touch.

That is, in my opinion, the most pleasing passage in Lauzun's Memoirs. The episode of the Princess Czartoryska, that interesting woman of whom he said : 'Nothing was wasted on so tender a soul, none could be more worthy of love ;' this episode would be touching if it were the last, and if it had crowned a life of levity and errors with a faithful and sincere sentiment. But one wearies of seeing Lauzun, hardly done with one passion and one misfortune, hastening so quickly to some new distraction. We feel that vanity and conceit still form the background of that soul which, momentarily, seemed worthy of a better direction. Whenever he attempts to express a little deep and true feeling, he is punished, his language is lacking in passion and poetry. It is not because he loves, but because he loves at random, because he is no sooner off with one love than he is on with a new one, that he wearies and bores the reader. Yes, at times, the reading of Lauzun does bore one : what a punishment ! what a lesson !

The portion of Lauzun's Memoirs which has aroused most curiosity, is that which concerns Queen Marie-Antoinette, by whom he was greatly distinguished for a time and whose favourite he would like to make himself out to have been. It was on his return from Poland, in the spring of 1775, that M. de Lauzun began to attract the attention of the Queen. He was twenty-six years of age, and was regarded in that idle world as an extraordinary person, whose destiny had been most fantastic.

Gallant and romantic adventures, travels, horse-races, a magnificent style of living, had brought him that rare distinction. He was the prince of fashion, and everybody swore by him. He began to be ambitious : quite recently, before and during his visit to Warsaw, he had addressed Memoranda to the Courts of Russia and France, relatively to the affairs of Poland ; he had some grand projects with regard to this topic of the day. With a view to repairing the unfortunate effects of the partition, he conceived the idea of uniting by interest and friendship the two sovereigns, the Empress of Russia Catherine, and Marie-Antoinette, and of being the link of that union. But we know very well now from the agreement of all testimonies that Marie-Antoinette was not a woman who readily concerned herself with politics ; only later, during the years of the Revolution, and when it became absolutely necessary, did she interest herself in them. Until that time, what this gracious, elegant and amiable queen particularly loved was a smooth and agreeable life, a life of gaiety and dress, in the midst of a society as select and as familiar as was possible at Court. The effect of Lauzun's political project was to frighten her ; but if she rejected the plan, she would not have been sorry to retain and attach to her person the negociator, who had indeed all the qualities for seducing a woman and a queen, and who in this case lacked no motive for attempting it. Lauzun's Memoirs at this place, especially if they are supplemented by the manuscript copies which contain a few additional details, tend to show that it was in his power, on a certain day, to take advantage of the tender preference which the Queen showed him : ' I was tempted, he says, to enjoy the happiness which appeared to offer itself. I was restrained by two reflexions : I have never wished to owe a woman to an instant of which she might repent, and I could not have borne the idea that Mme Czartoryska should think herself sacrificed to ambition.'

Whatever truth there might have been in this restraint of which he takes all the credit to himself, Lauzun continued, during eighteen months or nearly two years (1775-1777), to run the chances of the most perilous and the most envied favour. The Chevalier de Luxembourg, who had preceded him as favourite, was already set aside, and the Duc de Coigny, who was to succeed him, was

only appearing on the horizon. There was much talk of a certain white heron's plume that the Queen had remarked on Lauzun's helmet, which she had desired to have, and which had been given to Mme de Guemené to be offered to her. The Queen wore this plume on the very next day; 'and when I appeared at her dinner, says Lauzun, she asked me how I liked of her coiffure? I replied: Very much.—Never, she replied with infinite grace, have I been so well dressed; I seem to possess inestimable treasures.' All this had been much remarked, and had become for the Queen a source of scoldings on the part of her intimate friends, who were conspiring against Lauzun. Poor Court, so amused or terrified by a white plume, when the whole monarchy was already undermined and the respect of the people was secretly turning to hatred and contempt!

In all his relations with the Queen, Lauzun had perhaps some generous intentions, but he certainly assumed some chivalrous attitudes: he posed as a man who was continually ready to sacrifice himself, to make light of his advancement, who was devoted to her alone: 'Am I my own master? Are you not everything to me? It is you alone that I wish to serve, you are my only sovereign. . . .' In spite of a thousand checks and a thousand obstacles that he encountered at every step, he continued to enjoy, according to his foppish expression, *the most ridiculous favour that one could imagine*. Some words that the Queen said to him at a race on which she had betted one way and he another, and on which she had lost: '*Oh! you monster, you were sure of winning!*' these familiar words were overheard and gave the alarm to his enemies. They understood that the liking he inspired had not ceased. The numerous enemies he had at Court, particularly the little Polignac coterie, that intimate society of the Queen, resolved to ruin him once for all; and to that end they had but to set upon him, with some artifice and concerted action, the crowd of his creditors, for the life he had been leading, his horses, races, English bets, his travels in magnificent style in all countries, could not be long continued without a ruinous profusion. We should hear Lauzun himself when he says with a splendid insolence: 'I had considerable debts at that time, and, whatever people may have said about it, that was not very



extraordinary. Mme de Lauzun had brought me only an income of a hundred and fifty thousand livres. . . . In these simple words : *had brought me an income of only a hundred and fifty thousand livres*, there is a whole vanished *ancien régime*, and a too evident justification of a Revolution which, taking everything into consideration, and in face of such enormities, was legitimate.

May labour, may the moderate well-being that it brings, the well-being that is ever bought and ever looked after, may the morality that it introduces and keeps up in all classes, become more and more the habit and the law of the new society ! At this price we shall be consoled for having no more elegant Lauzuns.

At the date when Lauzun was indulging in this prodigal's reasoning, Franklin was arriving as an ambassador of his country at the French Court, representing the genius of good sense, of labour and economy, quite the opposite of a Lauzun.

Here, in 1777, at the age of thirty, Lauzun's destiny received a check from which he never recovered. He shook off his creditors only by means of an arrangement which changed the conditions of his existence. This ruined man was still left with an income which would have honourably fed many hard-working families ; but the prestige of the first, the fabulous, the liberal and inexhaustible Lauzun, had received a mortal blow. The novel hero had come into collision with reality and had been shattered : in the second part of his life he will try to be a hero of history, but fortune will refuse him the opportunity, and in refusing it she will be no more than just. We cannot be a Caesar, nor even an Alcibiades throughout, by mere wishing. I have just read again Plutarch's Life of Alcibiades : at one moment he was a great general, in his banishment he rendered his country signal services, he retrieved the honour of her arms on land and sea, and it may be believed that Athens would not have succumbed under Lysander, if she had not deprived herself a second time of Alcibiades. Lauzun was nothing of that, and Besenval, a rival, it is true, but none the less clear-sighted on that account, defined him very correctly :

*'A romantic man, incapable of being heroic, as a woman said to him ; seeing badly, having turned adventurer instead of being*

a grand seigneur and one day having the Gardes Françaises, to which he preferred a little regiment of hussards ; moreover, full of bravery, of charm in his wit, of elegance in his appearance. His wrong-headedness carried him into a party which should not have been his. God grant that he be not punished for it by the very men who have led him astray !'

The allusion is to the party of the Duke of Orleans into which Lauzun threw himself with all the malcontents of the Court, the men of thwarted ambitions and large debts.

But before this Lauzun served with honour in the American war, and his Memoirs end precisely with this war (1783). It is remarkable however that this man who, affecting the man of fashion, appears to be occupied only with women, and who would think it derogatory to that character not to take notice of every pretty face he meets with, does not enter into more particulars when he comes into contact with serious things and men of eminence. We get an inkling, as we read him, of the esteem in which he held Washington, but his pen is here as eager to hasten as it was to dwell complacently on the frivolous pictures at the beginning. The truth is that unless one is a man of the first order, a man who unites and combines within himself several men, one can never, though one is thirty or even fifty years of age, get rid of the stamp that an early life of that nature imprints upon the soul, upon the will, upon the whole existence. It is an unfortunate thing to have been so brilliant a roué and coxcomb : unless a man is decidedly great, he can never again succeed in being a merely solid and estimable man.

Lauzun, having become Duc de Biron, proved it. I will take only two facts which show the weakness of his character. He had attached himself, as I said before, to the party of the Duke of Orleans. At the beginning of '89, it was this same brilliant Lauzun, then Duc de Biron, whom the Duke of Orleans sent one day to Rivarol to induce him to publish a pamphlet on what they called the *dilapidations* (squanderings) of the Court. Rivarol, according to his own account and that of others, perused with a disdainful air the draft which was presented to him. After a moment's silence, he said to the plenipotentiary : 'Monsieur le Duc, send your lackey to Mirabeau ; let him take a few hundred louis and your commission is done.' Rivarol's answer was supremely

unjust with regard to Mirabeau, but it was only justly insolent as regards the Duke of Orleans and M. de Biron, his negociator.

About two years afterwards, in April 1791, the Duc de Biron took a step of a quite different nature with M. de Bouillé, who was commanding at Metz; he was the bearer of some quite Royalist proposals, again in the name of the Duke of Orleans and his party:

'The Duc de Biron, says M. de Bouillé, came to see me at Metz, in the early part of April: a member of the Constituant Assembly, a friend of the Duke of Orleans, firmly attached to his party, he was never, I think, the accomplice nor even the confidant of his crimes. He had been employed under my orders, and I had conceived a great friendship for him, not only on account of his amiable qualities, but for his loyalty, his openness and his chivalric spirit. In the conversations we had together, he spoke to me with much truth on the situation in France, with interest on the position of the King, with contempt of the Assembly and the parties which divided it; he showed an extreme desire that the King should be restored to his dignity, his liberty and his authority; that the monarchy should receive back its old constitution, with the exception of a few changes at least, which circumstances rendered inevitable.

'I expressed my astonishment that the friend of the Duke of Orleans . . . should speak to me thus. I told him that I did not believe that he was associated with his criminal conduct, but that, firmly attached to that prince, bound to his party, he should have abandoned him, since those were his ideas.

'He excused the Duke of Orleans; . . . he added that he did not approve of his conduct, but that being a friend of that prince and pledged to his party, he held it not in accordance with his honour to abandon him.'

M. de Bouillé is rightly astonished to see honour so misplaced. Lauzun's life is filled with this misplaced chivalry.

'I replied to him, continues M. de Bouillé: But how is it that you, an honourable and intelligent man, have not gained an ascendancy over your friend, and directed his conduct towards a useful and honourable goal? He said to me: *If the Duke of Orleans is weak, I am still more so.*'

We note the confession, and that is the only moral I wish to draw here. Whatever share of will and character Lauzun may originally have received from nature, the

use he had made of it in his early life had certainly contributed to diminish and enervate it in him. His first career had well prepared him for the weaknesses of his second.

What a subjection of character, in truth, and what a servitude under the outward show of these kings of fashion, who are its first courtiers, and who appear to be guiding the caprices of their time, whilst they are subject to them!

M. de Bouillé adds that next day the Duc de Biron came to him, and handed him in writing his conversation of the day before, in order to prove to him that it was sincere and that he could rely upon it. Personally, those who knew M. de Biron always mingled with their judgment of him a feeling of regret and a tribute to his brilliant, easy-going or generous qualities. Wrongly compromised, among the followers of the Duke of Orleans, in the torrent of accusations raised by the events of the 5 and 6 October, his friends tried to induce him to cross to England, as that prince had done: 'M. de Biron has just left me, wrote Mirabeau to the Count of La Marck; he is not departing: he has refused, because he is a man of honour.'

Having become a General of the French Republic,<sup>1</sup> by turns engaged with the army of the North, then as chief in the army of Italy, then in the Vendée, Biron desired and invoked an opportunity to distinguish himself which ever recoiled, and which he was perhaps not the man to profit by. La Fayette, who had seen him near by and who judges him without any ill-will, says, speaking of a first check which Biron suffered near Valenciennes, that with all his brilliant qualities he was 'destitute of the military tact so indispensable in war,' and that as he became more sensible of his deficiency, he was apt to fall into a state of indecision.<sup>2</sup> It was never given to Biron to retrieve his wrongs by a brilliant action until he died on the scaffold. He mounted it on the 31 Decem-

<sup>1</sup> A letter from Mme de Buffon to Biron, written a few days after the 10 August and the fall of the monarchy, which MM. de Goncourt have published in their *Histoire de Marie-Antoinette* (2nd edition, p. 351), lays bare the levity, the weakness, the improvidence and the illusions of this Orleans party, to which they both so completely belonged.

<sup>2</sup> Dumouriez says the same in his *Mémoires*, on the occasion of this same affair: 'Biron left Valenciennes and came to encamp at Quélérain. He is a very brave man, of an agreeable wit and character and very well-meaning; but he is not a great soldier.'

ber '93, accused of having, by his inaction in rendering assistance, 'favoured the successes of the brigands of the Vendée on French territory.' He was only forty-seven years of age. The story goes that the executioner called upon him in the morning, whilst he was breakfasting in prison, to inform him that it was time to start: 'You will permit me another dozen of oysters,' said Biron gaily, offering him a glass of wine. It is added that, with a more elevated feeling, he exclaimed at the moment of death: 'I have been unfaithful to my God, to my Order and to my King: I die full of faith and repentance.'<sup>1</sup>

One likes to think that at this moment of supreme justice, another name, another infidelity would have recurred to his memory, and that he would have said something more to himself if he had been able to foresee that, a few months later, his wife, that modest, charming and virtuous woman of whom he spoke so shamefully, and who was lauded by all except himself for her unchangeable gentleness, her calm and submissive reason and her bashful and retiring manners, would mount the scaffold in her turn. After leaving France for the second time since the commencement of the Revolution, she was unwise enough to return from England to Paris in the spring of 1794, in the hope of saving some part of her fortune which she expended principally in charity, and she perished with so many innocent victims, but the purest, the most angelic of all. Mme Necker had drawn a Portrait of Mme de Lauzun in her first youth which is full of delicacy and feeling, and which ends as follows: 'The Portraits of the imagination are the only ones that are like her;' she strongly recommends her as an orphan virgin to her good-guardian Angel: 'O you protecting Angel to whom Heaven has entrusted the days and the virtues of its dear *Émilie*, who watch over her steps in the midst of the dangers by which she is surrounded, let her acquire still new virtues and new charms; second her touching efforts, and hasten her progress towards perfection! . . .—' Take away a far-fetched and somewhat magniloquent comparison, and this portrait is delightful, a contemporary said; it has some very happy touches; it gives pleasure especially

<sup>1</sup> Some curious and precise details on this repentant and yet careless and still epicurean end of Biron may be read in the *Mémoires* of Mallet du Pan vol. II, p. 492 (1831).

to those who knew, not *Émilie*, as Mme Necker writes, but *Amélie*, and it pains one to think that that excellent woman, recommended to an Angel for her last moments, was given over to the hangman.' Of all pictures, that of the hangman is assuredly the most revolting, the most impossible to bring into contact with the person of the lovable creature who to the last had retained something of that pretty frightened bird that Mme Du Deffand compared her with, and of that bashful girl of eleven who was quite confused and abashed by a kiss from Jean-Jacques.

Thus it was that those who had caused the scandal in the old society, and who had offended most, perished, dragging with them in their fall the innocent ones who had suffered by them. In order to make Lauzun's Memoirs an almost moral work, to inflict his proper punishment on the writer, it would be only necessary to subjoin to the end of the volume all the eulogics and the unanimous testimonies on his virtuous wife, with the date of their two executions.<sup>1</sup>

The fate of these Memoirs was singular, by the way, and will suggest more than one reflexion. Apparently written by Lauzun for the amusement of some of his lady friends, copies were made of them which gradually spread and circulated. During the first years of the Revolution,

<sup>1</sup> Mme de Lauzun is called by Besenval, that is to say by the man who is least given to flattering the women of his time, 'a master-piece of education, and the most perfect woman he had known.' Lauzun began to be untrue to her even before he married her; for at the time when he used to pay his court to her in the parlour of Port-Royal, happening to meet there Mlle de Beauvau (afterwards Princesse de Poix), he took a liking for the latter and made her a declaration by letter; he entreated her consent in order to break off the projected union and to ask her of her parents: 'She had a horror of the Duke's proposal, and immediately sent him back his letter resealed. He bore a grudge against her, and avenged himself by making Mlle de Boufflers unhappy. The latter had the weakness to worship her husband, but the dignity to conceal it from the world. . . . She concealed it as if it were a guilty affection, and her husband never knew of it. . . . She was tall, with a good figure, and extremely fresh; but her beauty was a little marred by big short-sighted eyes, in which it was impossible to discern all her merit and intelligence. . . . Mme de Biron, pure, delicate, extremely bashful, gentle and modest in character, showed only to her intimate friends a mind as elevated as it was original. The Princesse de Poix compared her with an English novel heroine, with the more reason as Mme de Lauzun's tastes had anticipated the anglomania which was beginning to appear: English was as familiar to her as her own language, and the literature of that country was her delight.' (*Vie de la Princesse de Poix*, by the Vicomtesse de Noailles, 1855, a work published in a small number of copies, pages 19 and 33.)

the upper society became aware of the existence of these Memoirs and were quite terrified by them. In fact, some of the women who were named in them for their light conduct and their youthful adventures, were still alive and had since become solemn defenders of good principles, and worshippers at the altar and the throne. M. de Talleyrand, who had known Lauzun, came to the help of these ladies and these frightened families. In a letter signed by him, which was published in the *Moniteur* on the 27 March 1818, he said :

' The Duc de Lauzun, whose friend I was, wrote his Memoirs and read them to me. Some copies of them must have fallen into I know not whose hands ; what I know with certainty is that they have been horribly falsified.

' All who were acquainted with the Duc de Lauzun know that the natural charm of his wit sufficed to make his story attractive ; that he was eminently a man of good tone and good taste, and that nobody was more incapable than he of injuring anybody willingly. It is to this man however that they presume to attribute the most odious satires against French and foreign women, and the grossest calumnies against an august lady (Marie-Antoinette), who in her supreme rank had shown as much goodness as she exhibited greatness of soul in the excess of misfortune. Those are the most salient points in the pretended Memoirs of the Duc de Lauzun, which have been circulating for some time in manuscript, and of which I have a copy in my hands

' I should observe silence on this work of darkness, if I had not reasons to believe that this wretched manuscript was to be immediately printed.

' Forgeries and falsifications of works are not a new thing. At all times, passionate or mercenary souls have abused the facilities offered them by private, unpublished Memoirs, to spread, under others' names, the poison with which they are filled. But this kind of crime seems to become more common, instead of diminishing ; and it will no doubt increase, if people confine themselves to complaining without offering remedies.'

And after suggesting a rather vague and unintelligible scheme for a law against defamation and against every kind of imputation having a personal character, M. de Talleyrand continues :

' But, as these laws do not yet exist, I feel that I owe it to the memory of a man whose friend I was, to declare that *he did not write*, that *he was incapable of writing* and that *he would have*

*had a horror of writing* the Memoirs which they have presumed to put down to his name. If I do not wait until they are published, it is because in all probability they will appear when I am in the country and without my being informed of it.<sup>1</sup>

'I did not wish that my protest, through being deferred, should come too late.

'Le Prince de TALLEYRAND.'

In writing the above, M. de Talleyrand thought he was doing a good work; he was doing a work that was agreeable at least to persons of society, but he lied, and he lied knowingly, which is always unfortunate when one desires to do a public act in the name of morality.

I have before me a letter of thanks and gratitude which was sent to him on the 28 March, the day after the appearance of his article, by a noble lady, Mme la Duchesse d'Es. . . In it we read :

'I should wish, my Prince, that the importance of the service you are rendering were appreciated here. Nobody reads history, and the education of the drawing-rooms is derived from Memoirs. You proved to me the other day that their opinion had a great weight. A letter from you, depriving these Memoirs of their authenticity, destroys them, and foreigners, whom our misfortunes have made so important, will see in them nothing more than a romance. Any attack on the morals of the Queen implies a diminution of the respect due to Madame (the Duchesse d'Angoulême). You have therefore done a very important service. The day before yesterday they were dangerous; to-day *they are no more.*'<sup>2</sup>

But here we have a right to interrupt the high-born lady who decides the matter in so airy a manner, and to say to her :

'No, Madame, it is not in the power of any man, however exalted he may be by his name and influence, thus to reject and annihilate with a stroke of his pen any indiscretions, though they may be scandalous and prejudicial to a whole order of society. Even a Cato, in default of M. de Talleyrand, could not do so. The old society thought proper to live in a certain way, to use and abuse all the

<sup>1</sup> They only appeared three years later, and even then called forth a contradiction from the Duc de Choiseul, which was published in the *Moniteur* of the 22 December 1821.

<sup>2</sup> This autograph letter is found at the head of the copy of the *Mémoires de Lauzun* belonging to the National Library.



benefits that were accorded them. It is not the men and the women who are accused; others would have done the same in their place; parvenu plebeians would have acted like the Lauzuns, only with less elegance. But after all the old society, having lived in that way, could not be entitled to all the benefits, nor add to their excessive prodigalities and their past enjoyments the final consideration due to a perfect discretion and silence. The old society abused their privileges; they were punished and destroyed, and this punishment, this ruin is today openly justified by the successive confessions which have issued from their very midst. Lauzun's Memoirs existed before M. de Talleyrand's denial; they exist and count doubly after it, for we have a better appreciation of their importance. At first they appear only frivolous; they have a serious, a much more permanent side, and history registers them among the incriminating documents in the great trial of the eighteenth century.'

I desired here only to give an inkling of this manner of considering them; there is, in all things, an elevated and reasonable conclusion, which should never be lost sight of.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since the above article was written, Lauzun's Memoirs have had a series of adventures and have caused much unpleasantness to those who have concerned themselves with them. Published in May 1858 too much in accordance with the manuscript by M. Louis Lacour, they have given rise to protests, complaints, a law-suit. The virtue of the grand ladies of that end of the eighteenth century has found, on the one hand, zealous knights in the *Société des Bibliophiles*, and especially in the President of that Society (M. Jérôme Pichon), a distinguished antiquary with a very ardent devotion to the past; on the other hand, the grandson of one of the most compromised of those ancient beauties, who had been already named at full length in the edition of 1822, did not think that there was any right of limitation, and was not inclined to agree with Bouleau's opinion:

Mais qui m'assurera qu'en ce long cercle d'ans,  
A leurs fameux époux vos aïeules fidèles  
Aux douceurs des galants furent toujours rebelles?

A complaint was lodged in a court of justice as for a deed that has not yet entered into the vast domain of history, and, in consequence, sentence and condemnation (26 January 1859). The *ancien régime* was more accommodating in the matter of morals, when once divulged, and, after a first outburst of anger, society agreed to close its eyes; but for that the publishers of Bussy-Rabutin and Hamilton would have had too many accounts to render.

## NOTES

Page 10, line 13 from bottom. *Zuïre*: Voltaire's pathetic Christian tragedy, in which Orosmane, like Othello, kills the heroine from jealousy, and then himself.

Page 11, line 2 from bottom. On Mme de La Tour-Francqueville see the *Causerie* in the second volume of the present translation, page 51.

Page 12, line 16 from bottom. Custom: 'an old and general usage that has obtained the force of law'.

Page 17, line 7. 'Though strict Modesty for a moment should veil her cheek, let her golden girdle never be undone!'

Page 18, middle. Presumably the bean was hidden, according to a very widespread custom, in the Twelfth cake, and the finder became King of the Feast.

Page 22, line 8. *Toothings*, or *toothng-stones*: the stones or bricks left projecting at the end of a wall, with a view to extension.

Line 19. *Roxelane's nose*. Roxelana was the favourite Sultana of Solymán II, and had, according to Marmontel's description, 'un nez en l'air'; hence, *un nez à la Roxelane*: *nez retroussé*.

Page 24, line 9 from bottom. Clerk of the Secret: Louis XV, who was naturally suspicious of his Ministers, had established an intelligence department, known as *le Secret du Roi*, which head ministered personally and without their knowledge.

Page 29, line 3 from bottom. *Friend of Man*: the elder Mirabeau was a theoretical philanthropist and an active promoter of physiocratic ideas, and published several voluminous works, among the *L'Ami des Hommes*, 'le bréviaire des honnêtes gens', as the Dauphin called it.

Page 35, last line. 'As he digs up the earth their grave, he will marvel at the giant bones of a past age'. Virgil, *Georg.* I. 497.

Page 37, line 2 from bottom. The Marquis de Pezai

(or Pezay) published prose translations of Catullus, Tibullus and Gallus.

Page 42, line 13 from bottom. 'For hardly had I passed out of the school-gates when I fell joyous into the arms of two families'.

Page 43, line 5. 'My heart of sixteen, intoxicated with heavenly bliss, was filled with a chaste love whose perfume it still retains. I dreamt of happiness, but the dream was short'.

Page 45, line 7, etc. 'Instead of the weary labour of the vigilant pen, wasted in reproducing these fugitive writings, which fall a prey to the ravages of time; little movable characters, picked out by an expert hand, quickly drop into their places in the word, giving shape and flight to ideas; the ink is passed over the level type, and, quickly issuing multiplied from the rapid press, the discourse speaks to the eye from humid sheet'.

'Alas! why must study, like all pleasures, beguile the young with its intoxication? The masterpieces of good taste, reproduced through my labours, have occupied my days, have enchanted my nights, and often, mad fool! have I shed tears, like the armourer, forging weapons, who, greedy for exploits he cannot share, whistles a war-like tune and dreams of battles. . . .'

Page 45, line 6 from bottom. *That poverty which La Bruyère has described so well*, in his Portrait of Phédon.

Page 46, line 11. On the *malady of René* see the first volume of the present translation, page 99. *Oberman* (1804), by Sénancour, a series of letters supposed to have been written by a solitary and melancholy young man from the valley of the Jura and other places. *Adolphe* (1816), a short novel of love and disillusion, by Benjamin Constant, which forestalled the method of the modern school of analytical novelists.

Page 47, line 16, etc. 'Thus was I led astray to foolish vows, and I kindled my burning iambics with tears. I hated then, for suffering engenders anger; but a little happiness quickly converted me. What does the poet need to inspire his lines with clemency and indulgence to the human race? A kiss and a crust of bread. God tempered the wind to my naked poverty; but the brazen age continues for others. . . .'

'God, show thyself kind to others as to me! let thy manna fall and stifle blasphemy; prevent suffering, since thou wishest us to love one another, that thy disinherited cast not upon thy elect angry and lowering looks. Thou that feedest the young birds in their nest, feed all the hungry; let thy winter be mild to all nature; and, his reign over, the poet and the bird will sing and bless thee!

Page 47, last line. Les Charmettes, a village in Savoy where Rousseau spent three or four idle and happy years in the house of Mme de Warens.

Page 48. 'Love to the farmer's wife! she is so sweet and dainty! She is the bird of the woods that delights in its mossy nest far from the city's roar. Old beggarman with outstretched hand, poor motherless child, may you find on your path the farm and the farmer's wife!

'The poor man takes possession of the empty stool by the chumney-corner, and the great walnut press is not chary of its gifts; there one day I too sat down, my feet white with dust; one day . . . then up and away, and good day to the farm and the farmer's wife!

'My one fair day was fated to end, to end as soon as begun; but for me this is a sweet and happy memory: and closing my eyes I see again the farm-yard flooded with light, the hedge in flower, the little wood, the farm and the farmer's wife!

'If God, as our Curé tells us in his sermons, repays a good deed (even mistaken), ah! let him think of my debt! may he shower flowers on the valley, joy on the cottage, and guard from winds and tears the farm and the farmer's wife!

'Every winter, may a group of happy children laugh around her distaff, like the white-threaded Angels of the Virgin Mary; may they all, leading a little brother by the hand, rejoice with their games the farm and the farmer's wife!

'My little Song, take thy flight! thou art but a feeble tribute; but the nightingale in April will make amends. Frightened by her love-songs, may the bird of the grave-yard long, long keep silent for the farm and the farmer's wife!

Page 49, line 14. Auguste Marseille Barthélemy (1796-1867) made himself famous by a series of vigorous political

satires in verse, directed against the Bourbons. The *Némésis* was a weekly periodical, appearing from March 1831 to February 1832, in which the actions of the Government of Louis-Philippe were criticised in verse with wonderful power. The mouths of the authors were at last stopped by a large *douceur*.

Page 49, line 15 from bottom. 'Let my public come ! my poetry is ripe'.

Page 50, line 1. Gilbert's premature death gave rise to a legend, popularised by A. de Vigny's *Stello*, that he died in extreme poverty in a Charity Hospital. The truth (which for once at least Sainte-Beuve has missed) is that he was in receipt of several pensions, and died from the consequences of a fall from a horse.

Page 50, line 15 from bottom. Vergniaud, one of the greatest orators of the French Revolution.

Page 50, line 8 from bottom, etc. 'And with blushing brow I will confess it . . . Into the church by chance my steps wandered, and I touched the altar and prayed not'.

'Long ago, my childish lips opened of themselves to the Latin syllables of the prayer, and on the great days I went, a white chorister, and emptied to God my basket and my heart. But since . . .'

'How many young hearts consumed, how many young brows already furrowed by doubt ! Doubt, alas ! crushes me too, and I succumb : my weary soul is like the dove wandering in her flight over the desert waters ; and the saving olive-branch does not yet flower . . .'

'These thousand memories recurred to my mind, and I stammered :—"Lord, give me faith !" Then suddenly over, my brow passed that icy breath which erstwhile passed over the brow of Job. The wintry wind wept in the hollow vaults, and suddenly I felt that I guarded still in the depths of my heart, unknown to myself, a little of the old faith, a faded perfume'.

Page 52, line 10, etc. 'Dusting with his eye each faded picture'.

'Page of truth whose last line the trembling Golgotha sanded with its dust'. (A reference to the use of sand for blotting purposes.)

'The poor madman felt, in the papal city, a *shower-bath* of flowers flooding his pale brow'.

'A blue corn-flower growing among the roses of Provins'.

Page 53, line 4, etc. 'If there is one sweet name, made for poetry, oh! say, is it not the name of the Voulzie? The Voulzie; is it a broad river with large isles? No; it is quite a little stream, hardly seen, flowing with a murmur as soft as its name; a thirsty giant could drink it at a draught; the green dwarf Oberon, playing on the edge of its waters, could leap it without wetting his bells. But I love the Voulzie and its woods black with mulberries, leaping and murmuring in its flowery bed. Oft as a child, seated in the shade of the bushes, have I translated these vague sounds into human speech; poor dreamy school-boy who was thought unsociable, when I crumbled my bread for the bird on the bank, the stream seemed to say: "Hope! on evil days God will pay thee back thy bread". God is still in my debt!'

'Yet I forgive thee, O my Voulzie! and in my sadness I have so much need of a confidential friend to love me, to speak to me softly and beguile me, that before closing to the light my eyes so long beaten by the wind, I will make to thy banks a holy pilgrimage, to see again all the shrubs so dear to my youth, to slumber again in the murmur of thy rustling reeds, and talk of the future with thy lying waters'.

'Flee, white Soul, a sick and naked body; fly with song to an unknown world! Fly without fear: severed from a holy friend when I felt the need of pleasure, thou, a slumbering Dove, wast neither an accomplice nor a witness of my errors. Not finding the manna it implores, my hunger bit the dust (madman!); but thou, my Soul, canst still declare thyself pure to God thy betrothed!'

Page 54, line 19. 'I prefer a tale in November to the sweet murmur of the spring'.

Page 56, line 10. The Dictionary of the French Academy, the standard dictionary of the language.

Page 56, line 15 from bottom. 'I have two large oxen in my stall, two large white oxen marked with russet, etc.'

Page 57, line 17 from bottom. 'This is the end of famine, eaters of black bread, drinkers of water!'

Page 59, line 8, etc. 'If thou shouldst see an anemone pining on the point of death and imploring the alms of a drop of water to save its life: shouldst thou, some

wintry day, see a swallow beating at thy window with its wing and begging a place at thy hearth; the swallow would have her home, the anemone its drop of water: why, O Poet, am I not to thee either the humble flower or the humble bird'!

'Bleatings and lowings, there you please me most; the shepherd's songs are charming in the scented meadows'.

Page 61, line 5. Adamastor, called the Giant of Storms, in *The Lusiads* of the Portuguese poet Camoens, rises up and prevents Vasco da Gama's further progress round the Cape of Storms, now called the Cape of Good Hope.

Page 98, line 13 from bottom. On Mme de Genlis see the *Causerie* in the fourth volume of the present translation, page 16.

Page 100, line 14 from bottom. The Marais, with the Place Royale, now the Place des Vosges, was in the time of Louis XV the centre of aristocratic Paris. Many of the old sumptuous hôtels are still standing, but have been given over to industry.

Page 100, last line. Sappho's (Mlle de Scudéry's) pretension appears, from allusions in Molière's comedies, to have been shared by the aristocracy in general: 'Les gens de qualité savent tout sans avoir jamais rien appris'. (Mascarille in the *Précieuses ridicules*.)

Page 102, line 6. The Hôtel de Bourgogne, the first and for a long time the only play-house in Paris.

Page 122, line 11. 'Oh! what a noble disdain made thy mouth to smile, when a ruffian, avenger of that truculent ruffian, thought to make thee pale with threats of death!'

Page 122, line 9 from bottom. Alceste: Molière's *Misanthrope*.

]Page 129, middle. 'O Versailles, o woods, o porches! living marbles, antique cradles, Elysium adorned by gods and kings, at sight of thee a little calm and forgetfulness falls upon my soul, like fresh dew upon withered grass'.

Page 145, line 17. 'M. de La Châtre avait exigé de mademoiselle de Lenclos un billet comme quoi elle lui serait fidèle pendant son absence; et, étant avec un autre, dans le moment le plus vif, elle s'écria: "Ah! le bon billet qu'a La Châtre!"'

Page 148, line 10. 'All other pleasures do not equal the pains of love'.

Page 189, line 11. 'I am weary of wit, it arouses my anger, it confounds my brain. Lambert, I will seek a refuge with you between La Motte and Fontenelle'.

Page 195, line 1. 'You who, at the fair *Hypatia's*, every Friday discuss virtue, philosophy, etc.'

Page 197, last lines. 'Angelic of face and beautiful of body *Necker* combines all the virtues of mind and genius'.

Page 200, line 19 from bottom. On Mme de Caylus see the *Causerie* in the fourth volume of the present translation.

Page 201, line 8 from bottom. Meleager, at the time of his birth, was condemned by the Fates to live only as long as the brand that was then burning on the hearth. His mother extinguished and concealed it, but afterwards burned it herself, thus causing his death.

Page 206, middle. *Pætus Cecinna* of Padua, a Senator, was accused of conspiracy against Claudian, and carried to Rome by sea. His wife, *Aria*, who accompanied him, stabbed herself on the ship, and presented her sword to her husband, who followed her example.

Page 208, last lines. Mme Necker's posterity: Mme de Staël; the latter's daughter, the Duchesse Victor de Broglie, one of the most distinguished women of her time; the latter's daughter, Comtesse d'Haussonville, who wrote under the pseudonym 'Author of Robert Emmet'; the latter's son, Comte d'Haussonville, a writer and politician, author of *Sainte-Beuve, sa vie et ses œuvres; Le Salon de Mme Necker*, and a member of the Academy.

Page 213, line 16 from bottom. *Cucupitère* or *Coucoupière* (*Petrus ad Cucullum*), a surname of Peter.

Page 214, line 11. *Le Petit Carême*, a collection of ten, *le Grand Carême*, a collection of forty Lenten sermons by Massillon, first intended for the young King Louis XV.

Page 216, line 17 from bottom. Ragotin, an undersized provincial briefless barrister, the butt of practical jokes in Scarron's *Roman Comique*.

Page 221, middle. There were two Ducs de Roquelaure in the seventeenth century: the elder is described as being the ugliest man in France, but greatly appreciated for his 'esprit facile et bouffon'; to him is attributed the *Momus français et Aventures divertissantes du Duc de Roquelaure* (1727). His son rose to be a Maréchal de



France, which honour he owed, according to one authority, 'à ses bouffonneries, à ses intrigues effrontées et aussi à la faveur de sa femme'.

La Courtille was, in the seventeenth century, a garden suburb and favourite resort of Parisians. There were celebrated the orgies of the Mardi gras, and the return of the masqueraders on Ash Wednesday morning (*la descente de la Courtille*) was 'one of the gayest if not the most edifying sights' of the time.

Page 221, line 1 from bottom. *Burette*: the *cruet* or *urceole* used in the missal service; in the plural it was also used familiarly for a *pair of pistols*.

Page 222, foot-note. 'The Abbé Maury has not an impudent look; nor a pedantic tone; is not an intriguer; loves neither gold nor bribery; is not envious; nor a bore; neither crafty nor treacherous; nor a bad priest; has never laughed at mischief: God help the good Abbé Maury!'

Page 228, line 11. See the *Causerie* on La Grande Mademoiselle in the fifth volume of the present translation.

Page 229, middle. Chérubin: the saucy page in Beaumarchais' *Mariage de Figaro*.

Page 229, line 15 from bottom. The Duc de Richelieu, grand-nephew of the Cardinal, distinguished on account of his worldly successes. 'His whole life was a scandal, and he remains the most brilliant type of the depravity of the age'. At twenty-four, although unable to write correctly, he was assisted by the ladies into the French Academy.

Page 244, foot-note. 'But who will assert that during that long cycle of years your ancestresses remained faithful to their famous husbands, and always resisted the blandishments of the gallants?'

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